



**NATIONAL  
DEMOCRATIC  
INSTITUTE**  
**FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

**ELECTION 1999:  
THE VOTERS SPEAK**

**Five-Province Focus Group Study**

**Research Report  
March 1999**

**Street Law  
With the  
National Democratic Institute  
for International Affairs (NDI)**

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THE VOTERS SPEAK**

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## ***Executive Summary***

Voters in this five-province research project help illuminate the experiences and understandings of the young South African democracy. This focus group research project geographically and demographically was designed to reflect a cross-section of South African voters. The research design ensured that the voices from first-time voters, women, rural voters, voters from informal settlements, those who are happy with democracy and those who are alienated, were heard in the course of the research. These voices were recorded in the Northern Province, Gauteng, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape. The study provides perspectives on how South Africans from all persuasions and backgrounds relate to democracy and elections on the eve of this country's crucial 1999 second democratic election.

Participants in these 23 focus groups contributed their range of voices to this project, giving their time and sharing their perceptions, to help give researchers, administrators, politicians and the rest of their fellow South Africans a window of understanding onto their feelings and motivations about forthcoming elections.

### **MOOD OF THE ELECTORATE**

Two broad trends characterized the mood amongst the participants in these groups of South African voters. On the one hand, they protest the insufficient level of change to their lives in the first term of democracy. On the other hand, they have settled into the business of elections and democratic representation. These voters often have highly critical assessments of government (in all three spheres), but they cherish the notion of elections and the electoral power afforded to them. Other voices in these groups accept that all South Africans now share the political stage, and they now try to find their "safe corner" in this setting.

Many protest the fact that "so little has changed in our lives". Yet, all participants in these groups, especially black South Africans, acknowledge the value of equal rights, human dignity and political power. These are the victories that they hope to consolidate in the forthcoming election. Elections and voting are the means through which they envisage that this consolidation will happen.

On the material and social services front, not all voters in this research project have experienced significant change to their lives. Most have experienced some change, yet these changes often fall short of expectations. Most voters still have hope that things are to change for them as well. The 1994 vision of a "better life for all" remains fresh in the minds of many of these participants. The biggest stumbling block is the creation of jobs. All lament this crisis. Urban voters are highly affected by the interaction between unemployment and crime; rural voters are concerned with the breakdown of previous relationships of authority and perceived lessened chances of "ever finding a job".

Unemployment and its effects on society colour virtually all views of these focus group participants. This issue presents the ultimate litmus test of much of government actions; it helps define the purpose of elections; it directly affects voters' definition of their role in the new South African society.

## **ELECTIONS AND SOUTH AFRICAN VOTERS**

The voices from these focus group participants indicate that South African voters of 1999 on the one hand are people who are proud of their newly acquired tradition of voting. On the other hand, there are those who are either still struggling to find their exact role in the democratized South Africa, or are gradually coming to an acceptance of new roles. Almost across the board, these voters are convinced that the individual voter wields significant power over politics and politicians in South Africa.

There is evidence of subsiding euphoria and growing realism in the expectations of what elections can achieve. Yet, elections for most of these voters remain a symbol of hope. For many, the 1994 election itself symbolizes liberation and victory. The associated "voter power" for these South Africans entails the power to continue working on a stubbornly adapting system. Others have a sense of hopelessness. They doubt whether they can make impressions or have an impact. Other voices in these groups express the need to use their votes to simply register their dissent from dominant directions.

South African voters have experienced certain disappointments in the post-1994 period. The belief in the power of the vote amongst these participants, however, combines with an ongoing commitment to the government that was voted into power in 1994. For them this is an expression of support for the democratic system that they chose. Two strong beliefs among these participants are that the democratically elected government "needs more time" and "ought to be given "a second chance". Other voices register the need to use their vote to support parties that oppose government.

Voters in this study believe in competition between political parties, mainly in aid of "ensuring better performance by the government". In a sophisticated style, they threaten to switch their votes, and insist that they will make the parties work hard for their support. However, most participants in these groups do not believe that democracy depends on them, themselves, acting to ensure stronger opposition parties. Democracy is seen as "the right to vote for the party of our choice". In the opinion of many, votes for several of the opposition parties might cause a return to the past.

## **MOTIVATION TO VOTE**

South African voters as mirrored in these focus group participants in 1998-1999 continue to be highly motivated to vote. Many participants draw a sophisticated distinction between party and organizational sentiments, on the one hand, and voting and electoral engagement, on the other hand. Criticism of government performance in the case of these voters is not an indication of disengagement or alienation from politics.

The 1994 election result and its break with the past are firmly etched onto the minds of these focus group participants. They cherish their recently won right to vote. The recently enfranchised participants almost without exception intend continuing to use their acquired voter power to effect the changes that they continue to dream about. "Our vote is our voice", is the opinion of voters who simply intend exercising their continued right to vote for the sake of making known their presence and diversity.

Many participants build their arguments in favor of voting on justifications of why, despite criticisms and disappointments, they remain engaged in the acts of voting and extension of party support. They often calculate which political party effects them the best chance to realize further change to their daily lives. Many of these participants still live the culture of liberation, and feel the need to ensure the continuation of their right to vote and freedom of choice. Other focus group participants are working through the task of telling why they will vote, even if the parties of their choice will be relatively small. They are also considering the tactical choices of where their votes will show optimal returns.

Many participants engage in between-election contestation (criticism of government, threats to switch political parties or threats to disengage). They proclaim that they want to ensure that the only political party that they consider being viable will engage in a campaign of actively wooing them. They will "play hard to get" and will pressurise their party to improve performance.

Those participants in these groups who indicate that they will abstain are mostly motivated by a sense of disappointment and moderate alienation. Relatively few participants, however, expressed this sentiment. Many participants, for a variety of reasons, state that despite not seeing "full delivery", or, not anticipating their party winning, it is important to continue voting. They will vote, even if that is just to give them "the right to criticize afterwards".

## **MOBILIZATION, TURNOUT AND ELECTION LOGISTICS**

The biggest obstacle to voter turnout appeared set to be voter registration. Yet, voters themselves, at the time of the October 1998 fieldwork, did not fully recognize that they may be compelled to register. Many of the participants still invoke the "miracle of 1994" and reckon that that model remains good enough for them. Some other participants use arguments of long time needed for ID applications, administrative bungling with applications, or them being "very busy working" as explanations for low enthusiasm for registration.

Participants are generally motivated to participate. They believe that the electoral process will be efficiently run, that violence and intimidation will be restricted and that their ballots will be secret. They also believe that they will only need "reassurance voter education" for 1999. Yet, many still feel that the 1994 process of no-registration and free choice of voting location was the optimal system and that it should be emulated in 1999. Many others have bought into the system of registering to vote, mainly for reasons of order and efficiency and for barring foreigners from voting.

First-time voters have fairly divergent motivations and needs. Many already are motivated to vote. Others feel alienated, mainly because of disempowerment in terms of not understanding the need to vote and not knowing enough either about government or about political parties in order to make an informed voting decision. The major need for voter education therefore is in the terrain of motivating the voting act, of providing information on why it is important to vote.

The more experienced, as well as first-time voters, have the need for reassurance voter education. They wish to be reminded of the steps in the voting process, especially if these should differ from the way things were done in 1994. They prefer visual rather than verbal presentations. They also prefer

minimal word usage and clear photographic or drawing presentations (both of steps in the voting process and of the interiors of the voting stations).

Participants have a high regard for the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). This regard, however, continued to derive, almost exclusively, from the spillover effect of 1994 and the broad perception of overall success of that election. Today's IEC is assumed to be the same organization, with the same ability to deliver another miracle.



## ***Introduction and Research Methodology***

This research report is based on 23 focus groups conducted in October 1998 across five of the nine provinces of South Africa. Focus groups are an excellent method of qualitative research. Through its emulation of human group interaction and social communication it leads participants to explore feelings and orientations. This form of research is known for its ability to explore below the surface, and to provide in-depth and reliable measures of how categories of people feel and are likely to react in specified situations. It is for these reasons that focus group methodology was selected as the appropriate form of research for this project.

At the request of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) supported and facilitated the conduct of this study. NDI was involved in the initiative because of its experience in voter education in the 1994 elections in South Africa and in similar focus group studies conducted in South Africa over the last five years. NDI engaged the partnership of Street Law, a university-based NGO with a long history of involvement in democracy, human rights and voter education. With its national grassroots presence and diverse staff, Street Law is able to conduct research in South Africa's eleven languages and in urban and deep rural areas, which have been difficult for many research firms to reach. Susan Booysen, an independent political research consultant and professor of Political Science, was contracted by Street Law.

In 1998 Street Law formally entered into a cooperative, capacity-building relationship with NDI. This cemented the preceding 1997 cooperation, which saw the successful implementation of the Lesotho voter education and rural KwaZulu-Natal traditional leadership projects. In 1998, the trained Street Law moderators underwent re-training in preparation for the current project. An additional team of new trainees complemented them.

Training was designed and in four of the provinces implemented by Booysen, in her capacity as research consultant. Booysen also drafted the discussion guide, assisted in establishing the profiles of the focus groups, oversaw fieldwork in three of the provinces and was responsible for analysis and writing of this report. A range of persons from NDI and Street Law contributed their comments in the drafting of the final report.

Street Law facilitated all logistics regarding the implementation of this large-scale research project. This NGO also undertook the transcriptions and translations of all of the focus group discussions. Upon the implementation of the fieldwork, the Street Law moderators were chosen on the basis of compatibility with participants in terms of language, culture and gender.

## ***Composition and Location of the Focus Groups***

In the first three weeks of October 1998, a total of 23 focus groups were conducted across five of South Africa's provinces. These focus groups represent a spread across urban and rural landscapes, gender, age, socio-economic status, employment status and previous participation in voting. The groups were specifically designed also to reflect a range of first-time voters of both genders. A total of eight of the groups either were exclusively or predominantly first-time voters. The planning of the

focus groups took particular care to provide a distribution across metropolitan, urban, small-town and deep rural locations. The groups were conducted across the Northern Province, Gauteng, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape.

Financial constraints precluded the coverage of all nine provinces. For the purposes of this research project, it was considered a priority to gain an in-depth understanding of most of the provinces, rather than gather more superficial evidence on all nine of the provinces. As the findings in this report indicate, we may indeed be confident of having gained a better understanding of large sections of the South African electorate at this particular point in the development of South Africa's young democracy.

Five of the groups were conducted in the Northern Province, six in Gauteng, three in the Free State, five in KwaZulu-Natal and four in the Western Cape. In line with the character of the province, the Northern Province groups were mainly rural. A small number of these groups were conducted around the Pietersburg area. The rest moved to small town, rural and deep-rural locations. In Gauteng, the metropolitan areas of central Johannesburg and townships and settlements around Johannesburg were prioritized. We included Orange Farm and Ennerdale, as well as the community of Deelkraal in western Gauteng. The metropolitan areas of KwaZulu-Natal, as well as rural points in southern KwaZulu-Natal were covered in this round of focus groups. In the Free State we started in areas close to Bloemfontein and then also covered the minefields of the northern Free State. Our focus in the Western Cape in the first place was on the Cape Flats areas of Mitchell's Plain and Guguletu. We then moved to settlements in Grabouw and the outlying areas of Paarl.

The 23 focus groups included 15 groups of black voters (seven of each gender and one mixed-gender), 3 groups of white voters (two male and one female), 3 groups of coloured voters (two male and one female) and 2 groups of Indian voters (one female and one male). In total, eleven of the groups were amongst women; eleven amongst men and one co-ed group was done amongst students in the Northern Province. (See Table 1 for the full list of groups, as well as the demographic composition of the groups.)

This total of 23 focus groups provides excellent coverage of the five provinces as far as the criteria of focus group research are concerned. This number compares favourably with, for instance the 18 groups used by the NGO Matla Trust in its nation-wide voter education research project for the 1994 election, and with the 1997 Matla Trust research project that utilized 5 groups for the Gauteng province. We are confident that this research, through the focus group method, provides a reliable, in-depth understanding of core orientations of a range of South African voters.

The discussions were based on a detailed and specifically designed discussion guide (see Appendix 1). The moderators translated the guide into the languages of the local community.

This report relied on the following direct observations and transcriptions: the observation and direct verbal translations of 8 of the 23 focus groups, full and summary transcriptions of all 23 focus groups, debriefing forms completed by each moderator after completion of the focus groups, and debriefing sessions that were conducted with the focus group moderators in the cases where all of the groups were not directly observed by the author of this report.

*Table 1:*

*Composition And Location Of The 23 Focus Groups*

Date

Location

Demographic description

Group No.\*

**NORTHERN PROVINCE**

10/10/98

Turfloop

Men and women, first time voters (17-22), university students, from various rural and urban backgrounds

1

10/10/98

Levubu

Men, 25-50, white, rural, farmers, English and Afrikaans

2

11/10/98

Mukondeni

Men, rural, black, 23-50 years

3

11/10/98

Mukondeni

Women, black, 40 years and older, rural

4

12/10/98

Acornhoek

Men, 22-33 years, black, rural

5

**GAUTENG**

3/10/98

Soweto

Women, metropolitan, black, 23-40 years, various African languages

6

3/10/98

Alexandra

Men, metropolitan, black, first time voters, various African languages

7

4/10/98

Deelkraal

Men, urban, white, 19-32 years, Afrikaans

8

17/10/98

Orange Farm

Women, 23-40 years, black, various African languages

9

19/10/98

Central Johannesburg

Women, first time voters, white, English, students

10

23/10/98

Ennerdale

Men, semi-urban, Coloured, first time voters, Afrikaans

11

## **FREE STATE**

13/10/98

Rockland

Women, black, 23-40, unemployed

12

13/10/98

Phelindaba, Bloemfontein

Men, first time voters, black

13

15/10/98

Thabong, Welkom

Women, black, first time voters, students

14

## **KWAZULU-NATAL**

6/10/98

Gamalakhe, Port Shepstone

Men, 30 years and older, black, Zulu, mostly teachers

15

6/10/98

Umzinto, South Coast

Men, Indian, 40 years and older, mostly unemployed, English

16

7/10/98

Canaan, Durban

Women, 23-40 years, black, unemployed, Zulu

17

8/10/98

Gezubuso, Pietermaritzburg

Women, 18-32 years, unemployed and employed, black, very poor

18

11/10/98

Reservoir Hills

Women, Indian, 18-40 years, middle class, English

19

## **WESTERN CAPE**

17/10/98

Mitchell's Plain

Women, first time voters, Coloured, students and young employed, mostly English with some Afrikaans

20

17/10/98

Grabouw

Women, 23-40 years, unemployed, urban and rural, black, Xhosa

21

18/10/98

Guguletu

Men, first time voters, black, Xhosa, unemployed or school-leavers

22

18/10/98

Paarl

Men, Coloured, 23-40 years, unemployed and employed, lower working class, English and Afrikaans  
23

The numbers in the right-hand column of Table 1 are the numbers in brackets after each of the quotations in the text. In reading the text, please refer to this Table.

### ***Insights From These Focus Group Voices***

The voices that we record in this report probably can supply election managers, election analysts and party political agents interested in South Africa's "Second Election" with some of the most useful material to help understand the range of "South African Voters 1999".

The research findings in this focus group project shed new light on the public opinion poll findings that regularly appeared in the course of 1998 and early 1999. The focus group voices provide the complementary research findings. Through these voices the current research project explores the depths of voter perceptions of political developments and progress in South Africa's still new venture into democracy. The participants help us understand deep-seated motivations to vote, commitments to democracy and assessments of government and partisan politics.

The quantitative opinion polls had major findings regarding political identification and vote intention. One of the most consistent opinion poll findings has been that a large proportion of the South African electorate remains politically uncommitted or uncertain whether they actually will vote in 1999. Yet, poll findings started to explore motivation to vote and enthusiasm about elections. They provide the broad contours of the current South African political landscape. For instance, the majority of the polls emphasized that the 1999 voters, in contrast with 1994, often will be likely to abstain from voting when it comes to Election 1999 (see the polls by Markinor, Idasa-SABC, Markdata and the HSRC). Some of these findings in the latter half of 1998 also reported that South Africans often lack positive impressions of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). The current focus group findings not only help us understand the why of intention to vote or to abstain, they also provide us with new insights into the range of orientations that link threatened abstention with attitudes of commitment to democracy and voting.

The current research project therefore provides depth and new insights. It assists us in gaining the in-depth understandings of the feelings and perceptions of the South African voters. Through its exploration of the emotions, memories and expectations we may learn a great deal about how South African voters relate both to participation and to party political choice.

We also gain new insights in how a variety of first-time, young South African voters relate to their new status as South African voters. For instance, we learn that whereas they are less historically and political identity-driven than the more mature voters, their approach to political choices and their perceptions of elections are very similar to those of their more mature counterparts. They do need

more motivation and their voter education needs are amplified. Their greatest need is to get help in defining their political roles. For instance, why they ought to participate in elections, and what these choices would mean to them, are some of the questions they wish to have answered.

### ***Structure Of This Report***

The presentation of the research findings moves from the general to the specific. The rest of this report is structured into the following four sections:

The report starts with assessments of the mood of the South African voter. It explores the assessments of the direction of the country and experiences of life in the community. These experiences and perceptions are intertwined with voters' evaluations of how government has been faring.

The second section in this report explores perceptions of elections and voting. It delves into voter orientations on governance and multi-party democracy.

In the third section, we explore in-depth the issues of motivation, turnout and campaigns. The range of South African voters whose voices are reflected in this study show a deep commitment to voting, albeit driven by different motivations. For instance, we found motivation to participate for in the name of "duty", for the sake of "opposition" or in aid of driving the system towards the vision of the "better life for all".

Even with the highest possible motivation, the hurdle of voter mobilization still had to be addressed. The fourth section therefore investigates orientations towards voter registration and conducting the elections. Voters' orientations towards the IEC constitute a particular focus. We address the different needs for voter education among particular segments of the voter population, with a particular view to the first-time voters.

## SECTION 1

### MOOD OF THE ELECTORATE

#### *"South Africa Since 1994"*

"Things are both better and worse", was the judgement call of many of these focus group participants. The period since 1994 brought the elating experience of equal rights and dignity. It put in power a sympathetic government. Many changes followed. Almost all from the historically and continuously disadvantaged communities have also experienced positive infrastructure or public service-related changes in their lives. Others from these backgrounds still have hope that the changes will come their way. There is a widespread recognition that the democratically elected government has made inroads and that many lives have been positively affected. Problems remain, but the memories of an infinitely worse and very racial past remain vivid in the minds of many in these focus group participants. Other voices in the discussions echo various levels of acceptance of a new status quo and new political and social realities, changes that they would not have "dreamt of accepting five years ago".

"We have equal opportunities with the whites, and we have learnt that reconciliation is the only way forward" (15)

"It is good to see racial tolerance and freedom" (7)

"We now are treated as people by the whites, not like animals anymore" (21)

"Our town has filled up with other race groups. But it's weird how we still keep to ourselves, kind of like 'integrated apartheid'" (8)

"I've lived in this country for 43 years and I think these past five years haven't been too bad. At least they are trying to do something good. I think we have to give them much more of a chance" (16)

"In the olden days nobody bothered to listen to us when we complained, but now things are becoming better" (4)

"South Africa since 1994" has brought change. Yet, new voters such as many in these focus groups also know that they want more and that they deserve more. They are prepared to apply their muscle as voters to try to get what they need. Voting and elections quickly became ingrained in their political beings. Optimism in the overall mood often directly relates to the participants' perception that they can use voting and elections to have their needs fulfilled, even if it is going to take time.

Multiple references to the two sides of the need-and-delivery coin characterize discussions of "the direction that South African has been going since 1994". Dissatisfaction with "lack of delivery" more often than not is voiced on the general and on the rhetorical levels. Yet, when participants enter the domain of discussing specifics, their own communities and their political and human rights positions, few voices accumulate around the "no change" pole of the debate.

Few participants in these groups have simple, one-dimensional judgements on good or bad, right or wrong directions in which South Africa or its new government has been heading. Participants stress that they criticize because they expect better. There are many explanations of why change has not yet reached all South Africans. They deliver mixed judgements of improvements and remaining gaps.



Even those who insist that "nothing has changed" entertain discussions about experiencing more freedom and of receiving respect as human beings. They often acknowledge being aware of some changes happening for at least some people and at least that they are being listened to when, nowadays, they go out to complain.

Focus group participants from white racial groups often were divided in their reactions to the new South African society. Most felt that despite far-reaching changes to their lives, many positives have been added. Few in this grouping wish to exchange "life post-1994" for "life pre-1994". They do note the "turning of the tables", in which "anything that we complain about now is construed as a racial issue". Some willingly accept this and explicitly note the desirability of the ending of apartheid. A smaller section amongst these participants grudgingly accepts this position and finds fault with all of the new order. In the words of this Gauteng participant, "I really don't think it's easy for us to think of anything good going on in the country these days".

Of all the participants in these groups, participants from the coloured working class possibly felt most disempowered. There were few reports on positive experiences over the past years, and few expressions of hope for the future. Middle class coloured and Indian participants were more upbeat and more appreciative of the value of democratic government and a culture of human rights.

"It is in these four years that we have lost everything and have seen nothing change" (23)

"The coloured people were not treated with respect under the NP government, so we were hopeful that things would change, but nothing has changed" (20)

The one issue that consistently threatened to overwhelm the sense of progress and achievement since 1994 was the curse of 'the lack of jobs'. Some participants have a sense of "however bad the past, at least one had a chance of finding a job".

"Things are both better and worse, because we have new democracy while at the same time unemployment overwhelms us. If the government can create jobs, we will all enjoy the new democracy" (5)

"Things are better, but the past is still haunting us" (22)

"Things are worse since the elections. In the past people were getting jobs, but now unemployment is rife" (18)

"Most people are not working, which was not the case on the past" (20)

The dark side of the mood amongst these focus group participants is further reflected in their experiences of crime, poverty, insufficient respect for human life, and of fraud and corruption in many domains of public and private life. Several racial differences emerged on some of the problems. Corruption, fraud and disintegration of public service are issue areas that are much more likely to receive mentions from the white and Indian group participants. Nepotism and partial caring for needs is the black-African angle on the similar problem. Sentiments vary on the extent to which things in these cases are seen to have deteriorated. White voices often are the harshest ones in the judgements of public service in South Africa. "Inability", "inefficiency" and "incompetence" are words that are commonly used in these descriptions of post-1994 South African governance.

In weighing up the positives and the negatives, one of the strongest overall impressions on the mood in these groups is that few South Africans have given up hope. Glimpses of hope manifest themselves in these voters continuing to believe in the goodwill of the new order, giving credit whilst often exercising vehement pressure for better results, or believing that things will still happen for them, even if little has yet happened. Gauteng voters often appeared less hopeful than the rest. "The economic situation is so bad. We no longer have faith in the future of our children" was a remark that reflected the mood amongst the group of White City, Soweto women.

"If Nelson Mandela could just insist that whites stay, rather than telling them to stay if they want to. He should make the people who are out there want to come back. We want to have hope" (2)  
"The future of our children is both bright and hopeless. We have the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, and yet there is not hope that the children will get jobs in the near future" (5)

### ***Perceptions Of Government***

Whereas most aspects of mood in this research project are closely entwined with issues of governance since 1994, participants also offer a range of specific assessments of government. The extent to which South Africa's new, democratic government is seen to care for and communicate with ordinary citizens leads to a range of assessments of the three spheres of government. Participants do not always clearly distinguish national, provincial and local government from one another. Participants have clear, yet often very abstract, notions of the work of national government. There is an emerging sense of local government and its work. Provincial government, however, is poorly defined in the minds of the voters represented in these groups.

Many participants in these groups make clear that they feel empowered to pressurise, criticize and challenge government. Their criticisms, however, hardly ever are without recognition that demands on the new government have been huge. Many voices stress that government needs more time to make more of a difference, and that inexperience in office often contributed to mistakes having been made. Amongst participants of this orientation it is often stressed that the government needs "a second chance". Despite their "disappointments" that democracy did not deliver more, and deliver faster, these voters continue their dreams for "the better life". The "second chance", they believe, will bring to fruition this "better life".

The listing below provides typical reactions to government by the focus group participants. We list five typical reactions to varying perceptions of government performance in the period since 1994. The sets of quotations are set out in an approximate order in which the focus group voices appeared to resonate, ranging from the "very loud" to "relatively soft".

### **EXERCISING TIME AND PATIENCE BECAUSE BETTER PERFORMANCE WILL HAPPEN:**

"Our government officials are also human, so mistakes are bound to happen. The government is always prepared to listen to us, so they have already addressed some mistakes" (17)  
"The government will learn from its mistakes and put its house in order" (6)

### **PRESSURE AND CRITICISM TO URGE GOVERNMENT TO BETTER PERFORMANCE:**

"We shall vote, but we have to be very hard with the politicians. We have to tell them how we are suffering and how they need to help us" (16)

### **"BLINDLY" HOPING THAT GOVERNMENT WILL MAKE THINGS HAPPEN:**

"We will just go ahead and vote, because we have been told that President Mandela will provide us with a better life" (4)

### **THREATENING TO VOTE FOR ANOTHER PARTY TO MAKE GOVERNMENT PERFORM BETTER:**

"If perhaps this time we vote for another party, then government will try harder" (1)

### **DESPONDENCE BECAUSE OF LACK OF GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE:**

"When the new government took over we had hoped that things would change. Instead, the situation has gone from bad to worse" (4)

"The changes are so minimal. The only difference is that we have a new government" (4)

The most general lament is that despite some change for the better, the scarcity of jobs has been robbing people of their dignity, their hope and their appreciation of the new South Africa. Participants from most backgrounds appreciate their political freedom and freedom of speech. They often also feel that they have leverage over government. Many others have either directly experienced change (roads, water, electricity, etc.) or have hope that these changes will be coming their way. There is hardly any perception that government has not been trying. The catchphrase amongst many of these participants is that government should be trying even harder.

A number of voices emphasize that the ANC as government has not had all the power it had needed to implement the required changes. They point to power-sharing arrangements and opposition parties opposing some Bills that had been intended to address needs. Voices in various groups stressed an anticipation for the ANC to become "the majority party in the real sense", because then there no longer will be delivery problems.

"For the ANC to address most of our needs, it needs to win the elections by a two-thirds majority" (5)

### ***Assessments Specifically Of National Government***

Of the three spheres of government, national government emerges with the most credit, despite still being heavily criticized. National government often is seen as really having tried to make a difference.

Nelson Mandela and his perceived goodwill are often associated and equated with achievements of national government.

These assessments regularly extend into minority communities, such as the group of white farmers from Levubu. They distinguish between political and administrative change of power. The first was welcomed. They feel that their lives and work situations or businesses improved as a result. The second, they argue, happened too haphazardly. The skills and experience lacked.

"I was happy when we got democracy. But it would have been easier if it were introduced more gradually" (2)

Many of the remarks about national government centered on the Members of Parliament and their lack of visibility. The case of the Orange Farm women illustrates a typical set of reactions when participants were asked for their images of MPs. "We do not know them", "they are in Cape Town" and "they are far from us" constituted the total of what the Orange Farm women had to say about the Members of Parliament.

Top-of-mind images of Members of Parliament hardly ever are positive. Assessments from all groups at best are "neutral", for instance with reference to functions of passing legislation. Negatives abound, for instance MPs are viewed as argumentative, fighting, asleep, pathetic, selfish, rich while others starve, self-serving and hopeless. Positive perceptions of national government often are linked to the persona of Nelson Mandela, as first-term president.

"Our MPs are just there for money, they are resigning once they accumulate enough money" (7)

"The provincial government does not care about us. It is because of the President that we have the houses that we do" (16)

### *Assessments Of Provincial Government*

Assessments of provincial government mostly were very harsh. These governments in a number of cases are seen as "the most corrupt of them all", not really having anything meaningful to do, or at best invisible to the ordinary citizens.

"Their message does not reach us, and neither do they reach us. We never see this provincial government" (23)

"The only where things are changing is in Pietersburg. Officials in the provinces just help their own families" (4)

"The changes that we have seen, have been on the national level, not on the provincial" (19)

"The president sends the provincial government to do good work, but they give false reports about our areas here in the far north" (4)

"We voted for them (the provincial government), they got rich and they forgot about us" (4)

"People whose needs are catered for are those in the ruling party in the province" (15)

"It was a good idea to have provincial government but now they eat money and do nothing" (10)

"Our premier does nothing for us because he wants us to blame the ruling party in the national government" (15)

## ***Assessments Of Local Government***

Participants report divergent experiences of local government. In a number of cases local government and councillors are seen as people who really "are making a difference". In many other instances, however, the participants see their local governments as absent, absorbed in a new life of luxury or as nepotistic in their actions. Local government is often described as non-existent. Other participants stress incapacity, alienation, the misuse of funds and corruption.

"They are like the provincial government, because they only do good things in their own areas" (3)

"The cater for their own needs. They forget the needs of the community" (1)

"Local government structures only function in the urban areas" (15)

"The councillors are doing nothing at all for us" (6)

"The problem with local councillors is that they do their work part-time" (15)

"It is as if local government simply does not exist" (2)

"They are doing nothing for us... If they could stay in the communities that they serve, they would be able to know their needs" (9)

There were only a small number of cases, for instance in the Acornhoek and Alexandra groups, where participants were clear in their positive regard for local government.

"We are happy because local government came to us" (5)

"Our local councillors have done a lot for us. Our township is no longer has filth in the streets. Community leaders really try their best" (7)

## ***Negative Assessments As Reaction To Neglect In Communication***

Irrespective of the sphere of government, these voter participants often feel neglected and forgotten. There is a desire to learn more about what has transpired in government in the post-1994 era. This is reflected in the commonly expressed desire that in the 1999 election campaign they will get to see their representatives. In that process these participants hope for report-backs on efforts and successes. They often equate a feeling of "forgotten, we don't see our representatives" with diagnoses of "forgotten promises". The analysis of these focus group transcriptions instilled the sense that the rhetoric of "forgotten promises" is being used to taunt the politicians into entering into dialogue with local communities.

## ***Life In The Community***

It is when people relate their experiences of "life in the community" that their dreams, forgiveness and patience sometimes wear thin. Almost all groups relate experiences of reconstruction and change since 1994, albeit often challenged by accompanying tales of decay or disintegration. These positive experiences sometimes are also fragmentary, or dwarfed by greater needs. Some participants struggled to come up with much that they like or appreciate in their communities. Examples of such groups were women's groups in Soweto and in the far Northern Province's rural areas.

Some aspects of community facilities or services often have started changing for the better. Participants "concede", in the flow of discussion, that these changes are fine, but that they need and expect much more. The following two consecutive remarks from women in the Orange Farm group symbolize discussion trends from virtually all of the black groups:

"Things have changed. We all have rights and are treated equally" (9)

"There is unemployment, and now we are unable to pay for the services" (9)

The lack of public facilities, for instance for community life, recreation and sport, often topped the lists of things that were wrong in the community. More intense were communities that still suffer the absence of running water and electricity, where water has to be carried from miles away, where ten public toilets have to serve a whole informal settlement and where the fear of fires because of winds and the lack of electricity dominate lives.

These physical hardships are amplified by unemployment. No prospects for jobs, in or beyond the communities, resultant increases in crime and spirals of social decay were related in numerous groups. The elder people had little hope for their children or for the youth in the communities. The young themselves either related the temptations of "the good" life, or their struggles to find role models... and for these models then to remain available in the communities. Tony Yengeni (politician, Guguletu) and Brian Baloyi (soccer star, Alexandra) are some of these township people that the young yearn to have around, as "role models with presence in the community".

"There is nothing that makes us happy, because we do not have water" (3)

"Unemployment is rife and there is no hope left in our community" (3)

"Things that are making me happy are electricity and a shopping centre" (5)

"We face the problem of crime, like all other places. People are mugged, raped, killed... We do not feel safe anymore, not even in our own houses" (6)

## **SELECTION OF ASSESSMENTS OF LIFE IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE COMMUNITY**

### **NEGATIVES ON SOCIAL SERVICES**

"The government has stopped our pensions. There is no rain and there is nothing to live on from the fields" (4)

"One cannot even use the parks in our area anymore... Vagrants, dumping" (20)

"The quality of the school education really depresses us" (20)

"The police cannot help protect us anymore" (2)

"Criminals are just released or given bail, even with serious evidence" (15)

"The justice system is corrupt. Gangsters are tipped off by police, or released" (6)

"We live in fear of fires sweeping though the community" (17; also 20)

"Government-owned property is being used for squatter shacks" (16)

"The new government promised us jobs, but instead the situation is deteriorating" (6)

## **NEGATIVES ON HUMAN AND POLITICAL RIGHTS**

"The prisoners have rights and crime is rife..." (15)

"Because of all their rights, parents can't discipline their children anymore. There is no respect for the parents" (3)

"Crime is rife because of poverty. Children who do not like schooling would feel that they can copy Chauke" (7)

## **POSITIVES ON SOCIAL SERVICES**

"Houses for the poor have been built. They really try" (1)

"They have put in pipes. But there is no water" (4)

"There are projects which teach the unemployed some skills" (9)

"Many things have changed. There is electricity. There are traffic lights" (1)

"We now have a clinic and our children are being given food at school" (15)

"Our schools have educational aids and computers" (15)

"We have cheap transport, free medical care, access to the formerly white hospitals, we are happy with the houses we got, but the jobs are scarce" (17)

"I am happy with the sewerage system which is being implemented" (9)

"We have gained some tarred roads, apollo lights, RDP houses, a mall and sports and recreation facilities" (6)

"We have old age homes and there are fewer street kids" (7)

## **POSITIVES ON HUMAN AND POLITICAL RIGHTS**

"There is transparency in the workplace" (15)

"Things are better now, because we can go wherever we want to, we can follow the careers we want to" (7)

"We are now treated with dignity in our country, even if we are so poor" (4)

"We can now stay where we want and we have democratic government" (17)

"Racial segregation is outlawed and all the South African languages are respected" (7)

"There now are children's rights. And people talk about the youth. At first nobody used to talk about us" (11)

These focus group voices project crisp images of life in the new South Africa. Much has changed, and many things remain to be changed. Realism prevails in assessments of progress and the achievement of the goals of the new South Africa.

## SECTION 2

### ELECTIONS AND ORIENTATIONS TOWARDS VOTING

The voters who participated in these discussions put forward a strong equation of the South African transition with the South African election of 1994. For instance, in the minds of many of these participants, Election 1994 continues to mean liberation, freedom and the delivery of dignity to the bulk of South African voters. Even if the post-1994 epoch is displaying cavities, this experience of democracy for them far outshines the preceding oppressive system. Others came to see Election 1994 as the symbol of them not having to flee or fear. More than prolonged negotiations, that particular voting day showed that there is space for all in the democratized South Africa.

The 1994 election gave voters a powerful sense of efficacy of the individual voter. The powers of recall of politicians and pressure on politicians to try faster and harder are etched onto the minds of a range of 1999 South African voters. In the minds of these voters, Election 1999, however, also is characterized by realism and the struggle to retain hope. The participants are burdened by severe unemployment, and this experience threatens to contaminate life in the new democracy. It is with regard to the immediate economic situation, with its accompanying implications for worsening crime, that participants sometimes retract into "life was better before" or "elections do not make a difference".

#### *Images Of Elections In South Africa - From 1994 to 1999*

When participants are asked about the images that spring to mind when hearing the word "election" a rich and overwhelmingly positive tapestry formed. Personal background and apparent political orientations (not specifically explored in this study) added nuances, but did not detract from the positives associated with elections.

Change, democracy, freedom, new government, a government for all people, a way of bettering our lives, to forgive and forget, to unite, to learn to live with other South African, are some of the images conjured up with the mention of Election 1994. Many participants also added references to excitement, euphoria, festivities and, above all, expectations.

"1994 was so exciting. We woke up and filmed the sunrise" (19)

"It was the day we found our dignity" (21)

"After 1994 we have rights, we are not treated like animals anymore" (15)

"The 1994 election means that our children get food at school and now we can go to the hospitals" (13)

Various participants, mainly from a range of minority backgrounds, do not share the positive assessments of elections. In KwaZulu-Natal, for instance, there were multiple fearful images of elections. Intimidation, fear, corruption and killings were some of the concepts that were spontaneously associated with elections.



Elections for some are associated with "feeling let-down". Lack of change in their lives in the post-1994 period dampens recollections of 1994 and limits anticipation of 1999. A minority of white participants in these groups are totally cynical. Elections remind them of "a circus", "a mockery", and "communistic happenings" or of "uncertainty". This latter grouping proclaimed "In Africa, elections is not a good thing. It is very good for the rest of the world though" (8).

"1994 meant we were free as black people and we are still hopeful that our needs will be addressed" (17)

"Elections did not make a difference. It made things even worse" (20)

"I would just say 'so what' if I hear the election being announced. It makes no difference to me. Those elections aren't going to get me anywhere" (8)

"The elections are not helping us with anything, because our lives are still going to be the same" (3)

"I am not interested in this election thing" (11)

### ***Subsiding Euphoria And Emerging Realism***

The euphoria of the 1994 liberation in the minds of a range of these focus group participants is gradually becoming supplemented by calculated assessments of government and opposition. They keep track of what government does for them and of who and which party offers the best prospects for looking after the voters' needs.

In the minds of many of the participants, the 1994 election remains intertwined with the end of white oppression. In many of their assessments, the 1994 achievement still needs to be consolidated. They feel that the party most strongly associated with liberation needs continued support in order to ensure the continued pursuit of "the better life". This emotion remains strong enough for many participants still to be predominantly motivated by the sentiment of "stopping the whites from returning to power".

"We are not as happy as in 1994, because we had high expectations" (3)

"We are no longer as happy, because in 1994 we were hoping that our lives would change for the better. Now we know it will take some time" (15)

### ***Elections As Continuing Symbol Of Hope***

"1994" in the minds of many of these participants is and was the symbol of hope. They cling to this hope. The 1999 election, they argue, will bring them one step closer to the fulfillment of their hope, and the promise of the better life. "I feel that we will now get a better life"; "we want to get jobs"; "we want to get changes in our lives" were the reactions from a group of Grabouw women when they talked about why they would vote in 1999. For many, both in this group and in this project in general, hope and elections have become equated with finding employment. Whereas many associate this hope with continued support for the ANC, others suggest that they will "look around" to see which party offers them the highest hope of the better life.

"Elections is a good thing. Maybe we can get changes" (19)

"Elections is a good thing. It brings changes in the lives of people" (15)

"I am hopeful that one day our needs will be addressed" (21)

"We thought in 1994 that we would get jobs soon" (21)

"We are happy because the elections will strengthen the democracy that we have. The government will get another chance to deliver" (3)

"In 1994 we just voted to bury apartheid, but now we vote for political parties that we think will best represent our interests" (15)

Despite their disappointments, and without 1999 election promises from political parties, the human nature of these voters, compel them already to link the 1999 elections to hope for change in their lives. It is the only instrument at their disposal, the only way in which that can reach out to government structures and resources.

"Elections are important, because we hope that there will be changes to our lives... We hope to get our roads fixed, to get water, and electricity" (3)

"Elections" also directly triggers ideas about job creation, associated with the election process. Many participants immediately express the hope that positions for the unemployed will be created by those who are to run the elections.

"Part-time jobs are scarce in the rural areas, so the elections will create jobs for many people" (5)

### ***Commitment To Voting And The Use Of Voter Power***

Disappointments with politicians and their often-low abilities to deliver with great speed only minimally detract from most of these participants' belief in voting. Negative images of elections occasionally cautioned against premature acceptance that elections "deliver". The negatives, however, mostly were mild, except in the case of cultural minorities such as some KwaZulu-Natal voters, or some white voters.

Embedded in the belief in elections as tool for change is both the belief in pressurising the governing party to make true on "promises" and the recognition that elections is the tool to replace governments, if so desired. These men from near Port Shepstone in KwaZulu-Natal gave concise reflections of such sentiments:

"The elections enable us to vote against a government if we feel that nothing is done to address our needs" (15)

"It is important to have elections, because politicians will make sure that they address the needs of people, as they know otherwise they will be voted out of power" (15)

The most common mild negative about voting was the 1994 elections' obvious association with "long queues", but this was not regarded as a deterrent. More damning are associations with violence, even if none of the participants appeared personally to have experienced violence in the campaign or at the polls in 1994.

"Long queues is a stupid excuse, because people do not go to the polls to consider tiredness, but to vote for political parties of their choice" (15)

The symbolical distance travelled by white South Africa since 1994 was well-illustrated in the observation amongst white participants that "this time around we shall not scramble around and go and gather canned food. We have accepted the new rules of the game" (2). A more conservative western Gauteng group also referred to their acceptance of the new rules of the game. "Your vote now is your fight", said one of these Deelkraal participants (8).

### *Sense Of Individual Voter Efficacy*

The voter voices from these groups provide insights into the reasons why large proportions of the South African electorate proclaim a commitment to vote in the 1999 elections. A strong sense of individual voter "efficacy" - the power of the individual voter to make an impact or to be listened to - emerges from these voices.

Voting in the mind of these participants is an act that demonstrates individual political power. This is seen as power to communicate wishes to politicians, but also more directly as power "to make a difference to our lives". The words and sentiments of the ordinary South Africans in these groups show that their primary concern is to use their votes for the betterment of their own lives. Those votes could go wherever in 1999 or in due course they perceive their best interests to lie.

These research participants act in the knowledge that the political parties seriously rely on every individual vote in order to guarantee their standings. "There is no political party that can win elections without being voted for", was the general common sense reaction when the following message was tested on the participants: "The ANC is big, it is the strongest party. It will win whether people go out and vote or not". The voters' sense of indignation in reaction to that message indicated that it is unlikely that there will be a voter complacency that may lead to low turnout.

"Any one person's vote could deny a good party a chance to win the elections" (15)

"My personal vote will make a big difference, it's common sense. How will it not make a difference?!" (16)

"We all know that a vote can decide who rules the country" (20)

"There are changes that have been made to our lives. Our votes will play a positive role, as they will enable the governing party to continue delivery and services" (9)

The voices from these groups reflected virtually no sense of voting "because of duty to vote". Voters regard their vote as part of a situation of give and take. They will give their vote, and will expect something tangible in return.

"If we don't vote, we shall blow our opportunity to achieve something for ourselves" (16)

"A person should cook in order to eat" (15)

"We can only have changes if we vote" (20)

### *Reconciling disappointments with the belief in elections*

Voters use the big debate about "non-delivery" and "broken promises" to their own advantage. The voices in this research project indicate that voters may consider the politicians' disadvantage in this debate as a bargaining point in their own favour. They argue that reminders of undertakings of the 1994 campaign will spur on the government to try harder. These group discussions show that clear understandings of the reasons why delivery sometimes had been delayed, or first implemented in prioritized areas, do not deter voters from protesting against "slow delivery".

Also, the discussions highlight that voters "object" to having been given promises in the 1994 campaign on what politicians hoped or intended doing for the voters. Yet, when they discuss their expectations regarding the 1999 election, many participants immediately set the lists of what they expect the political parties to undertake. They insist on clear undertakings, in effect promises. Only a handful of the respondents emphasize the need for ordinary people themselves to assume greater responsibility in changing their conditions, rather than relying on government.

"We are lazy, because we expect our President to do everything for us when there are opportunities to do things for ourselves, unlike in the past when only whites had opportunities" (7)

A chorus of voices in these groups acknowledges disappointment with the pace of delivery, but retain hope that more will come their way, and request government and the governing party rather just to make clear to the communities the precise state of progress after five years of democratic governance.

"Yes, but you forget that there are a lot of people out there who are angry, more angry than you or I, sitting there whose promises were not kept" (16)

"The disappointments are not that much, because we cannot expect changes overnight" (9)

### *Multiparty Democracy And Competition*

The presence of opposition parties is welcomed, even by the participants who stress ANC allegiance. These parties are especially positively regarded if voters reckon that their existence may contribute to the governing party trying even harder. Participants occasionally toss around threats of voting for opposition parties. They want to make the governing party aware that it has to work for their votes. They do not want their loyalty to be taken for granted.

"It is important for us to vote for other political parties, so that the governing party can know that if it does not deliver, another party will take over" (9)

"People should vote for the opposition parties so that corruption can stop" (10)

Participants sometimes specifically insist that they like big, strong political parties. They associate such parties with an ability to implement change. Growing experience in governance is also highly regarded. They believe that this will lead to improved prospects for change to their lives.

"The government is now experienced. After the elections the mistakes that they made in their first term will be addressed" (18)

"People like big and strong political parties" (6)

Some have reservations about South Africa's opposition parties (predominantly when these parties are rooted in South Africa's apartheid past). A range of participants felt that it is fine if other people vote for the opposition parties, but not they themselves. They also do not strongly associate with voting for the opposition for the sake of having a strong opposition. They think it is good to have party watchdogs, but mostly think that other voters can vote to ensure that, again not themselves. It was predominantly participants from white backgrounds that expressed the counter-view - support for opposition parties for the sake of registering opposition. The following sets of quotations reflect these two opposing series of views:

### **MULTIPARTY DEMOCRACY DOES NOT DEPEND ON VOTING FOR THE OPPOSITION**

"People must be free to choose the political party of their choice, regardless of whether it is big or an opposition party. There is no way that voting for the biggest party affects democracy" (20)

"We are not going to vote for opposition parties for the sake of opposition" (21)

"Multiparty democracy does not have to come by voting for opposition parties. We all have the right to vote for a political party of our choice" (5)

"The multiparty system is bad, because the opposition parties do not help the government. They just want to point to mistakes" (15)

"I don't think voting has anything to do with protecting multiparty democracy, so we cannot vote for opposition parties for the sake of that. We are going to vote for the political party of our choice" (6)

"Opposition politics is not always good. A lot of these opposition parties were party to apartheid" (3)

"If we vote for opposition parties, we will again find ourselves under the former apartheid political parties" (21)

### **IN FAVOR OF STRONG OPPOSITION PARTIES, EITHER IN PRINCIPLE OR WITH A VIEW TO SUPPORTING THEM**

"If you continue voting for a big party, without taking into account its mistakes, then you will be killing democracy" (1)

"Corruption and mismanagement of funds is less because the ruling party knows that there are watchdogs" (15)

"It is good to have many political parties, because the ANC will work hard knowing that there are many other parties" (18)

"The party in power will be effective if we have strong opposition parties" (19)

"The IEC should not allow too many political parties to register. The participation by many parties means a wastage of the taxpayer's money" (6)

"Support for opposition parties will keep the party in power in check" (19)

Participants also use the power of their vote, and the threat that they may vote for another political party, as leverage to persuade the ANC government to try harder.

"The government will listen to us if we vote, because they know that if they do not deliver, we will vote for another political party" (3)

"If the ANC sees that we vote for another political party, then it will come and make corrections. Perhaps then, we can vote for them again" (1)

## SECTION 3

### MOTIVATION TO VOTE AND CAMPAIGNS FOR 1999

The voices from these focus groups indicated a very strong intention to vote in the 1999 election. Approximately seven out of every eight participants argued in favour of voting in this second democratic election. Voting and elections for participants of all ages are associated with a seemingly unwavering belief in the act of voting.

"Irrespective of the final outcome, these days you have to go and vote" (16)

This observation includes first-time voters. The discussions showed that the first-time voters have particular uncertainties and therefore need different types of encouragement and reassurance than the more mature voters do. Yet, the flow of the focus group discussions also showed that the first-timers' uncertainties easily make way for an eagerness to join the ranks of those who created the "1994 miracle".

Voting, for a large proportion of the focus group participants, is associated with action for progressive social change. In many of the minds elections remain synonymous with liberation. Many other voters, for instance those from sections of racial minorities in the white, coloured or Indian population groups or geographically from "opposition party controlled" provinces of KwaZulu-Natal or the Western Cape, are driven by participation for the sake of registering an opposition voice. These voters often also want to stop the extension of the "culturally alien" power of the ruling party.

The results from these focus group discussions indicate that voters who intend voting and those who intend abstaining largely share the same concerns. They differ in their belief in the need for patience, belief that the government needs time to effect the "better life" and in the belief that their perseverance in voting is bound to make the ultimate difference. They also differ, to a small extent, in their belief of the extent to which, irrespective of party orientation, their individual votes will matter.

#### *The Anticipation And Uncertainties Of First-Time Voters*

First-time voters generally have great anticipation of joining the ranks of the voter corps. There is a sense that they are on the verge of joining that league of persons that made the 1994 miracle happen. Young voters from a range of minority groups sometimes share this anticipation. Others express alienation that is based on extreme uncertainty about their own roles in the domain of electoral politics.

"I feel now I have a responsibility as I am going to vote for the first time" (20)

"We are excited, because this will be our first time. If we vote, we can help get delivery in place" (1)

"At least you are getting the chance to vote now, for the person you like" (16) "I will be excited, because I haven't voted yet" (19)

However, most of the new voters in these groups voice some degree of political uncertainty. Many feel that they know little about progress and successes that may have materialized in South African in the past four years. They call on government and other public representatives to provide them with factual information.

Their uncertainty also relates to party or organizational politics. They profess to know little about party political programmes and objectives. It would make them happy to get such information from the parties. Generally, they are less driven by deep-seated party loyalties and party identification than many of their older counterparts. They suggest, more frequently than the rest of the participants, that they could make tactical switches of political party in order to ensure that the government works for their support.

These first-time voters' memories of the worst of the old order are not as sharply set as those of the older voters. There were young activists in some groups who have great certainty about their political options, but their voices appeared as a minority sentiment in the full set of first-timer discussions. Young black voters from Guguletu and Alexandra reflected the certain, empowered and motivated sentiments among the first-time voters. Young coloured women voters from Mitchell's Plain have uncertainties, but are determined to vote. Young male coloured voters from Ennerdale were most disinterested in voting, but in the course of the discussion developed more interest, after having gained more information.

The following set of quotations from the Free State group of male first-time voters provides an illustration of the extent to which voter orientations of first-time voters tend in the same direction as those of the older voters.

"The government cannot address all our needs in a short space of time" (13)

"The 1994 elections did bring meaningful changes to our lives" (13)

For most part, first-time voters in these focus groups share the motivations and concerns of the "average older" focus group participant. Their perceptions of elections and of the issues of South African politics largely coincide with those of the more experienced voters (see Tables 2 and 3). These two categories do differ from each other, however, in their levels of uncertainty regarding hope, personal mission and perception of a unique place in politics in South Africa.

### ***The Major Motivations For Voting And Abstaining In Election 1999***

***Table 2***

#### ***Reasons Why South Africans Vote*** ***Typical statements from focus groups***

Pride, democratic right and citizen duty.

It is our democratic right to vote.



It is our "duty" to vote after the long struggle that we fought.

We vote, so that we have the right to criticize.

Representation and government of choice.

We vote to get the government of our choice.

Vote in order to get changes to our lives.

Ensuring that the government listens to our needs.

Have a say in who represents your interests.

If you do not vote, it means that you give up on making a difference.

Accountability and delivery.

One can only bring changes by voting.

Keeping corrupt or puppet parties from winning power.

Vote so that we can get jobs.

Ongoing liberation and keeping out reactionaries.

To stop whites from returning to power.

To prevent whites from taking revenge on the winners of the 1994 election.

Voting in 1994 meant we became free of apartheid.

Voting gave us equal opportunities with whites.

Registering a voice for opposition parties.

This election is about establishing an opposition.

Compulsion to vote.

Implementing instructions from traditional leaders to go and vote.

The following sets of voices from the focus group discussions give insights, in the participants' own words, into the rich variety of reasons for voting. We highlight these voices in terms of two broad categories, those participants who are driven by hope as opposed to those who will vote, despite their not having hope.

## **VOTING WITH HOPE CONTINUED LIBERATION**

"We have to use the opportunity to vote, because the NP oppressed us for a long time. We should vote, so that the ANC can continue to rule" (22)

"We should vote, as we could not vote for a long time" (17)

"Africans have been denied the right for a long time. The idea that we can have a say in who will represent our interests encourages us to vote" (5)

"People should vote so that we do not go back to the days of apartheid" (9)

"Abstentions will take us back to the apartheid system" (6)

"If we don't vote, we shall be like we were three hundred years ago" (22)

## **TO HAVE NEEDS ADDRESSED**

"I will vote for the political party that I think serves my needs" (22)

"We will vote with the hope that maybe things will be better this time" (3)

"By voting I will be preparing the future for my children. We will be facing a shortage of land in Soweto soon, so our votes will address such problems" (6)

"There is always still time for the promises to come true. We must just not stop voting" (23)

"We can only get development and changes in our lives if we vote" (4)

"Perhaps voting can help get a better future for our children" (2)

"Our votes can enable us to get jobs" (17)

"If I vote for somebody I know, maybe my plea will be heard" (11)

"We look forward to the election so that more changes can come about" (19)

## **PRIDE AND INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLE**

"It makes you proud to go and make your little mark. It is just something that you believe in" (23)

"You will not feel like part of South Africa if you do not vote" (9)

"We see on TV that people vote all over the world, so we must do likewise" (6)

"I am a proud white South African. It will be unfair of me to moan if I had not put my cross on the ballot" (8)

## **VOTE TO ENGAGE, GET REPRESENTATION AND GAIN THE RIGHT TO CRITICIZE**

"If you do not vote, whom are you going to blame if things go wrong in the country?" (1)

"We want to establish a strong opposition. But what party is there today to offer this? We don't want these smaller parties to come and mess around" (2)

"If you do not vote you will be throwing away your chance to have a say in government, which would mean that your interests will not be represented" (9)

"Your vote is your fight. And we have much more character as a nation than just to sit back and let other people take away the future of our children" (8)

"We have to go and vote, but we just cannot yet see who or what we can be voting for" (2)

"If you didn't vote, you have no right to complain" (8)

"You have to vote, because if government does something wrong, then you have the power to scold them for failing you" (10)

## **VOTING TO AVOID SANCTION**

"We are told that if you do not vote, you will not get a job, you will not get a pension, because in your ID book there will be a stamp showing that you voted" (4)

## **VOTING WITHOUT HOPE**

### **VOTING BECAUSE NO KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT ELSE TO DO**

"When we have voted and they have won, they will forget us and nothing will be done for us. We have no one to turn to. If we knew where we could go to, we would not vote" (4)

"We are suffering. We are slaves. But we shall still vote" (4)

"Voting will not change anything, but we have to go and vote" (2)

## **ANGER, DISAPPOINTMENT, BUT DETERMINATION TO VOTE**

"We feel that we do not want to vote, because of the anger of not getting what we have been promised, but we are going to vote" (4)

"We still believe that they are going to bluff us again by making promises that will never be fulfilled. But to vote, we will go and vote (4)

"We will go on voting, while they will go on telling us lies" (15)

### **Table 3**

#### ***The Reasons Why South Africans Abstain From Voting*** ***Typical focus group statements***

Confusion, uncertainty.

Don't know what the political parties stand for.

Not sure whether voting will mean that interests are being represented.

Not sure, generally, why it is important to vote in elections.

Not recognizing anything that is worth voting for.

Not sure whether one can find the right party to vote for.

Convinced that elections won't make a difference.

Lack of voter education.

Feeling of having been passed by, and that it is too late to start voting now.

Disinterest, alienation.

Elections do not matter and it is nobody's duty to vote.

Disappointment in government corruption and self-interest.

Politicians are only interested in their own well-being.

Politicians only become visible at election time - they don't deserve votes.

Politicians just want to be famous and give nothing in return.

Disappointment and reaction against "non-delivery".

Alienation, disappointment because of no change or difference in life.

So many promises weren't kept - voting will make no difference.

The following sets of quotations from the focus group discussions help illuminate the reasons why a range of South African voters in the 1999 election may choose not to engage in the electoral process.

#### **DISAPPOINTMENT AND CANNOT SEE THE SENSE IN VOTING**

"In the forties I was raised in a shed here in Paarl, where Edgars is. I still have nowhere to live. And now they want me to go and vote?!" (23)

"The elections won't make any difference. Why must I go and vote? Even if I vote, I won't get the same treatment as others" (11)

"No-one will be prepared to vote in 1999, because of all the promises that were made in 1994 and weren't kept" (16)

"It scares you man, to have to go in to make a cross. I am not going to" (23)

"We as old people think that we should not vote, as everything we were promised has never happened. The youth can vote, maybe they can get jobs" (4)

"If people do not vote, we will know they are not ANC" (17)

"My vote won't make a difference. They won't give me a medal because I have voted" (11)

#### **DISAPPOINTMENT IN REPRESENTATIVES**

"Democracy is a good thing. The only problem is some of our leaders who do not have our interests at heart" (5)

"Members of Parliament are not worried about the people on the street" (15)

"If this guy Mbeki wants to be President next year, he must get off his backside and go and talk to the people, even if just for five minutes" (16)

"People who are not going to vote are those who say this government has simply done nothing for them" (12)

"Why must you vote for a person who makes a promise and never fulfills it? Why must you bother to vote?" (11)

## **NOT SURE WHO TO VOTE FOR**

"I will vote only if I can find a party or candidate that has the same feelings in their heart as me, that shares my hopes and fears" (16)

### ***Core Motivations Of The 1999 South African Voter***

Given the recency of South Africa's emergence into democratized politics, focus group voices, not surprisingly, often dwell on issues of political liberation and expectations of socio-economic change. The old order, in the minds of many, also remains associated with racial definitions.

### ***Liberation From Oppressive Rule***

Liberation from oppressive rule (in these focus groups almost invariably described as past white rule) remains imprinted on the minds of many of the focus group participants. It emerges as the one factor that weighs heavier on many of these minds than the theme of "broken promises". Various participants stress that they dare not stay away from the polls because of their varying levels of disappointment with delivery. The outcome of staying away, they argue, could very well be a return to power of the whites.

"If white people can grab power once more, they are definitely going to revenge. By Mandela's rule, it means we have hit these people where it hurts most" (15)

"The spirit of voting is because people want to stop the National Party from winning the elections. They want the government to remain in the hands of Africans as they know how they suffered during the white people's rule" (12)

"We must exercise our democratic right. We cannot just throw away what we fought for" (3)

"I believe that we must not disappoint Mandela so that white people can take over again" (12)

"I want to make sure that I remain under the leadership of a black person" (15)

"These people have promised us many things, and some of these things did not come about. But that we won't go to the polls... That is wrong, because white people will go to the ground and say: 'They have relaxed'" (18)

### ***Party Loyalty Versus Rational Choice As Motivation To vote***

This research project explored the possibility that voters may abstain because the ANC may be observed as big, powerful, and possibly guaranteed to return to power, irrespective of the individual voter participating or not. Contrary to this expectation, participants revealed a strong sense of individual political efficacy. Various groups emphatically stated that "the ANC can only remain big and win the elections, if it is voted for" (13).

The participants in these groups regularly were driven by trust in political organizations.

"The government has made mistakes. But it is just that I have this trust in them" (23)

"We shall vote for them, even if we have not seen anything" (3)

First-time voters in these focus groups often were less set in patterns of party identification. They were stronger than the more experienced voters in their insistence that parties be rationally assessed for their performance. The political parties have to earn their support from these voters. Participants also explicitly refer to their bargaining power vis-à-vis political parties that really want their votes. For instance, they argue that the fact that the ANC really wants their votes, could be the factor that will encourage the ANC to try harder. Others argue that the time has come for another party to be put on the spot and be given the chance to try its hand at governance.

"People voted for the ANC, because they expected all those things. Now they see this one brought water and not electricity, so let's try another party" (1)

Participants in these groups often referred to their determination to use elections to affect greater change to their lives. For instance, they argue that they have to continue voting in order to strengthen the hand of the government (often regarded as still new in power and not having had enough change to effect all the desired changes). A few voices in these research discussions asserted that they would try and find an alternative party that will be more effective.

### ***Voting And Needs Fulfillment***

The focus group voices show how perceptions of government (formed through delivery and change in lives) often affect perceptions of elections. Participants voluntarily and with great frequency refer to multiple connections between their motivation to vote and the reality, prospects for and setbacks in "delivery". They often see direct, functional links between voting and ensuring that their interests will be served. They often react overwhelmingly negatively to messages that suggest that they could stay away from the polls due to dissatisfaction with government performance. A fairly common sentiment is that they acknowledge problems and disappointments yet insist that the solution lies in persevering to vote, rather than in abstaining.

"Not going to the polls will not solve any problem" (4)

"Our government has made mistakes, but this does not mean that we should stop going to the polls. If we vote again, there will be ample time for them to change" (5)

Participants conveyed the message that they consciously use the "delivery debate" in order to enhance their chances of seeing conditions being improved. They reason that they voted in 1994 in order to see changes. Liberation and freedom entail such change. They now vow to continue voting, to use their leverage over politicians and political parties, in order to ensure change in concrete conditions.

Many of those voters in these groups express anger about delivery, or needs fulfillment, yet declare that it will not deter them from voting. The "power of the vote", in their eyes, gives them the political clout to make government and politicians work for their votes. The first-time voters in the groups also expressed these sentiments.

Some participants volunteer suggestions on how much time ought to be granted to government in order to affect delivery. For instance, 1999 will be "the last chance, and there's no third chance" (15). Others compare the four years in power with the former regime's forty-plus years, or say that it has been impossible to undo and rebuild the work of more than three hundred preceding years in four years. "Rome was not built in one year" was a favourite idiom in these discussions.

Corruption or alleged corruption also did not seem to pose serious deterrent to voting. Limited evidence of intention to abstain from voting because of government corruption emerged. Corruption causes more cynicism, especially amongst the white participants in this project, but at this stage not alienation to the point of abstention from voting. Many of the other participants have the perception that government has been working to counter, or has dealt effectively with, corruption.

"Government dealt effectively with those who are corrupt" (13)

### ***The Need For Strong Opposition***

Strong opposition parties, for many of the participants in these groups, seem not to be equated with the essence of democracy. This was the trend especially for black focus group participants. The white focus group participants, regularly and in contrast to this trend, contributed voices in favour of democracy depending on the presence of strong opposition parties.

"Voting for the opposition parties who were part of the apartheid government will take us back to the dark days" (13)

"Our main task in this election is to establish an effective opposition" (2)

Many participants insist that voting for opposition parties will not be a guarantee of democracy. They point out that democracy entails the freedom and the right to choose. So be it, if their choice entails support for the biggest, majority party, was a fairly commonly expressed sentiment

### ***"Campaigning 1999": Information Needs And Political Tolerance***

The desire for contact, accountability and a more direct sense of representation often superceded these participants' needs for party political information. The participants often request feedback, progress reports and people coming to their communities to listen and to hear. They feel weary of campaigns and say they rather want results. The younger participants, sometimes coinciding with the less politicized, want information on party political positions to supplement "government progress information". Most other participants say they would simply welcome information on progress on development.

The desire for contact, however, is primarily a desire to hear about progress in needs fulfillment. As these students from the University of the North noted: "It is not so much about seeing them (the politicians), it is rather that we want to see delivery." Participants had consensus that political parties should come and talk about themselves, not about the faults and weaknesses of the other political parties.

"The political parties that have failed always talk about the weak points of the successful parties" (22)  
"Election campaigns are an opportunity for political parties to make empty promises" (3)

### ***The Need For Reports On Progress In Governance***

Voices in these groups called for factual information on the state of governance and change. This need was expressed much more strongly than insistence on information on the different party political programmes. Most voters in these focus groups want first-hand information and direct communication that will provide to the point, comprehensive reports of achievements and failures in government. Realism and honesty are two key-words.

"I personally dislike to be told that I am beautiful when I am just okay, so I want the government to be honest too. They should tell us honestly what they will do." (20)

Participants in the same breath sometimes refer to "broken promises" and give reports of change, both in their own communities and elsewhere. Simultaneously, they talk the "broken promises" rhetoric, but insist that politicians come and talk to them about what they will do for them next time around. Far fewer voices insist on "no further promises". Intermediary opinions that emerge from these groups are requests for realism and the spelling out of time-frames.

#### **NEW PROMISES REQUIRED:**

"They should tell us what they will do for us, and why they want us to vote for them" (22)  
"They must promise us a better future for our children" (9)  
"The political parties must come and tell us about job creation" (9)  
"They should tell us about the changes they can make in our lives" (15)  
"I would want them to tell me what changes they are going to bring about" (11)

#### **NO NEW PROMISES:**

"They should focus on the things that they failed to deliver, and reassure the people that this time around they will work harder to address their needs" (6)  
"They should just reassure and forget about giving us new promises" (6)

Many participants want specific issue concerns to be addressed in Election 1999. They want to hear about employment, crime, education and houses. Job creation is foremost on participants' minds. Few groups did not directly and either repeatedly or extensively refer to the crisis of unemployment and their expectation of government to act for redress.

"We only beg them that what they have promised should be fulfilled - education, that we were not going to pay for water and that we will stay for free in our houses. We want this assured" (12)  
"They must know they have promised us heaven and earth" (15)



## ***The Need For Communication***

Many participants in these groups express rather simple demands in terms of what they require the politicians to do: "Communicate with us. Come tell us directly what is happening in politics and government." These participants typically stress that they "need no promises". They ask politicians "rather just to be realistic and honest" about the prospects for the community. (In other parts of the discussions, some of these participants, however, still insisted on specific undertakings from politicians.)

"They must tell us they will consult and be accountable to the people who will vote for them" (5)

"We don't know the people in government now. They are from our community, but we do not see them" (22)

"We are just voting for the sake of voting. We do not know these people that we are electing. They go and then only look after their own families" (4)

"They should ask us what our needs are " (15)

"They must be accountable to the people who will vote for them" (9)

"We have been forgotten by the politicians, because we do not get feedback on what they do to address our needs" (20)

"Our grandfathers voted them into power. And yet, the politicians only go and see them when they need their votes" (1)

"I will be glad if the political parties can come and talk to us. Then the people who suffer will be able to understand it better" (23)

Others have totally lost interest and declare:

"It does not matter whether they come to address us or not" (11)

## ***Information On Party Political Programmes***

The first-time voters in these discussions have a much bigger need than the more experienced second-timers for information on what the different political parties represent. The first-time voters, more than other voters, express intense needs to have confusion on politics and political parties resolved.

"Show us your steps and plans. Show us both sides of the story. We want to hear what has been done. Then we shall decide about voting" (20; also 1)

"They must tell us what they think they can come and do for us" (5)

"Wear jeans like us. Come to the community hall, and talk to us" (20)

"They should not tell us about other political parties, because we are not interested in that. We are only interested in what they themselves have to offer" (6)

## ***Tolerance Of Other Political Parties***

There are limits to political tolerance of "other" political parties. Participants in the Guguletu group, for example, stress that all parties are welcome to come and campaign "because they may have

support", but that "parties like the AWB and the IFP obviously are not welcome, and they would not even try to come anyway" (22).

This reflects a sense amongst many of the participants that tolerance "is fine", but that political parties themselves will recognize the limits of their welcome. Participants stress that if political parties have a "constructive" message, "plans for how to do things" and specifically reports on what they have been doing, especially for the particular community, they obviously will be welcome.

"We cannot chase the people who want to come and canvass. We will accept them and listen to them. If they did something good for us, we will vote for them. But if they did nothing for us, we shall not" (4)

The role of political parties in the 1999 election seems to be clearly demarcated in the minds of these voters. They give the green light for campaigning on specific proposals and contributions. They have tolerance of political parties that know the limits of their own territories. They have definite red lights for political parties that enter the communities with a view to only criticize others or without anything specific to bring hope to that community. They also specifically advise political parties to leave the function of voter education to neutral and independent organizations (see Section 4).

## **SECTION 4**

### **MOBILIZATION, TURNOUT AND ELECTION LOGISTICS**

These focus group discussions explored the range of factors that either will empower voters to participate in Election 1999, or which could obstruct participation, amongst those voters who are motivated to participate.

In descending order, participants in these October 1998 discussions recognize the following as factors that could demobilize them, whereas otherwise they would be inclined to participate in Election 1999 each of these themes are dealt with below):

#### **CONFUSION ABOUT POLITICS:**

Confusion and poor information about politics, political parties, government and the extent of progress towards achieving the better life, as well as uncertainty on why it will be important to vote.

#### **EFFECTIVE ELECTION MANAGEMENT:**

Perceptions that the election may not be free and fair, perceptions of possible incompetence in handling the election process.

#### **SECURITY ON ELECTION DAY:**

Fear of violence and intimidation, perceptions that voting may not be secret.

#### **VOTER EDUCATION NEEDS:**

Lack of ballot marking skills, lack of knowledge of logistics and processes on election day.

#### **IDENTITY DOCUMENTS AND REGISTRATION:**

Doubts about the merits of registration, skepticism about the possibility to get identity documents issued, hopes to emulate the 1994 model of no-registration.

The previous section addressed confusion and uncertainty about politics and voting as essential parts of motivation to vote. Confusion-uncertainty is probably the one composite factor that poses the biggest threat to high registration and eventual turnout. Most participants claim to have fairly limited voter education needs regarding the ballot and the steps in the voting process. The research also indicates that the political and voter education needs of first-time voters are greater than the needs of the voters who first participated in democratic elections in 1994.

Participants resist political parties actively engaging in voter education work. They feel that the standard, neutral voter education agencies may also be the ones to address the political aspects of

first-time voter confusion. "The meaning of voting" and "why it is important to vote" are two of the core needs amongst these participants that could be dealt with, many feel, by voter education agencies.

The development of discussions in these groups indicated that as the conversations progressed, and first-time voters became more exposed both to the dynamics of the voting process and materials used in other elections (voter education materials and ballots), they grew in confidence and interest in Election 1999. The group of young men from Ennerdale was an illustration of this trend.

At the time of this research, on the eve of the November 1998 first voter registration drive, participants were still debating the merits of registration. They had not seriously started considering it as an inevitable prerequisite to voting.

### ***Imaginary Announcement Of The 1999 Election***

The subject of the 1999 election was introduced into the focus groups by means of an imaginary radio announcement of a 1999 election day. The month of June was used as a hypothetical date. Many participants at the time were slightly taken aback by the fact that the "announcement" concerned the month of June, mostly because of the symbolism of the original April 1994 event. Yet, they felt that whereas April 1999 would be preferable, there would not be serious problems with another date. They felt, however, that any date except one in late April would require explanation to the electorate.

The biggest problem that participants had with the imaginary announcement was one of surprise in not having expected a date later than April 1999. A small concern in some of the groups was that it might be cold that time of the year, assuming that voters would have to line up for many hours starting from early morning.

Most participants seemed prepared to accept a date later than April 1999, should that contribute to the efficient implementation of the second democratic election.

Voters in these groups had the firm impression that elections again would be run over a number of days and that they may have to travel considerable distances to the voting stations. A relatively small number of participants in many of the groups had great certainty on which of the three spheres of government they would be asked to vote for in 1999. Many guessed, either just provincial or just national. Quite a number included local government on the 1999 election list.

### ***Factors In The Mobilization And Demobilisation Of Voters***

#### ***Confusion About Politics And Political Parties***

Confusion about politics, progress in governance and stances of political parties are core themes affecting motivation to vote amongst the participants in these focus groups (in this regard, one may

again listen to the voices expressed in Sections 2 and 3). The current section recaps this theme through the following voices. The following extracts from the discussions by first-timers show the depth of the needs for this type of "voter education".

"It is important for us to go and find out what the parties have been doing, what they have been good at, and what they have done badly" (1)

"I wonder whether I will be objective enough to vote for the party that I think has the potential to run the country" (1)

"I would like to know more about the person that I am to vote for" (11)

"They must also tell us the history of the parties that we are to vote for" (11)

"I am scared about the elections, because I do not now who to vote for" (20)

"My only fear is whether the political party that we are going to elect is going to be good or not" (1)

## ***Effective Election Management***

### ***The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)***

South Africa's Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) enjoys an overwhelming, although not uniform, level of goodwill from the participants in this focus group study. The current research findings indicate that much of this positive orientation at the time of the research rested on spin-offs from the "1994 miracle". Despite immense logistical problems, that election is associated both with the miracle of the specific day and with a successful transition to democracy in general. In the mind of these participants, it was the popular participation on that day, rather than intricate political negotiations, that produced the new South Africa.

The following quotations are typical of the evidence of affection towards the IEC, albeit largely building upon the 1994 version. (The 1998-1999 IEC by late 1997 was still largely unknown to the electorate.) Positive evaluations of the IEC came from both the first-time and the second-time voters.

"There is no advice that we can give to the IEC, because they already know how to run the elections" (4)

"The IEC was a good body. I wish that they will have the same attitude and do the same job that they did the last time" (1)

"They represent justice because they make sure that the elections are free and fair" (5)

Other participants, especially from KwaZulu-Natal, warn that the IEC should give attention to security, impartial electoral officials and guarding of the integrity of ballot boxes. Many of them caution that the IEC should assume a higher profile. A few of the participants were not sure at all what the IEC was. Some of the more conservative white participants equated the IEC with perceived inefficiency in government-related commissions, or simply declared the IEC to be a farce.

"The IEC should consider the problems we had in 1994, because we do not want to have those experiences that actually made the elections unfair" (15)

"The IEC will be much more effective and better organized this time" (9)

"I don't think they are doing their job. I haven't seen any adverts or anybody coming around to tell

what to do in the new elections" (16)

"If the IEC is another commission, they will make no difference. Commissions consist of people who do nothing but make a lot of money" (8)

On a more specific level, and given the priority issue of job creation, many participants associate the IEC with job creation. (This could have contributed to some of the positive assessments.) Participants commonly note that many people were employed around the 1994 election. This time around, many specifically urge government and the IEC to ensure that employment opportunities around election 1999 be created and that these go to the needy and the unemployed.

"Many people got jobs during the elections" (19)

"The IEC offers temporary job opportunities" (15)

"The IEC gave jobs to people" (19)

"The IEC should give preference to the unemployed people" (5)

"I think the IEC can employ local people who are unemployed" (9)

### ***Free And Fair Elections***

Participants trust the IEC's ability to conduct free and fair elections. This trust derives from the perceived 1994 successes. The lesser showing of the South African IEC's Lesotho namesake leads to warnings that the IEC should start preparations in good time so that we don't end up with the "fiasco of Lesotho". A small number of participants thought that South Africa's and Lesotho's IECs were one and the same body. Participants in various groups said that they do not feel themselves qualified to judge whether the 1999 elections are likely to be free and fair. Some of them simply stated that this would depend on the efficiency of the IEC.

### ***Security on Election Day***

#### ***Violence And Intimidation***

Violence and intimidation, in the opinions of these focus group participants, will not be a serious problem (if a problem at all) either in the forthcoming campaign or on voting day. They observe that political tensions have subsided, almost everywhere. They are also convinced that the election officials from the IEC, as well as the police, will be around to monitor situations.

The only fear, emerging in a number of the groups, is that party political tensions might, in due course, spill over. Tensions between the ANC and the IFP are still referred to, as are possible problems between the UDM and the ANC. Almost inevitably, the potential for trouble is linked to the grassroots supporters of these parties, especially in cases where there have been defections between parties.

"Holomisa's party talks propaganda about the ANC, so this is wrong, because people will fight" (22)

"There could be trouble between the ANC and those who have left the ANC for the UDM" (14)

"There will be trouble, because comrades regard Holomisa as a puppet" (22)  
"There may be trouble between ANC and UDM supporters" (9)  
"The IFP and the ANC leaders must start making responsible statements so that we do not have the same situation as in 1994" (6)  
"I think there are people who are going to die in the coming elections. I'm telling you" (11)

Most of the KwaZulu-Natal groups did not have fears about violence and intimidation, including the women's groups. They note that since the 1994 election took place peacefully, they doubt whether violence or intimidation will plague 1999. This sentiment was mirrored in groups of white participants.

"I think that we will be safe, because there was no violence in 1994" (17)  
"The IFP people and the hard-line Afrikaners now understand that the new democracy is a reality, so they will no longer try to resist the elections" (6)  
"The whole (1994) thing actually went off without too many hitches. We expected an African election to be different, we didn't think it would be peaceful" (8)

### ***Ballot Secrecy***

Participants have little doubt that their ballots will be secret. The 1994 experience convinced them. A few participants, however, related registration and barcodes to lack of secrecy of ballot. Some confuse officials' knowledge of them having voted, with identification of the ballots and consequent knowledge of which party they had voted for.

"If we are to vote for Mandela, it will be our secret" (4)  
"I do not even want Mandela to know that I will vote for him. It is a secret I must keep in my heart" (4)  
"A voter will be alone in the voter booth so secrecy will be guaranteed" (17)  
"You may tell someone that you will vote for a certain party, but once you are in that booth you can do whatever you want to" (7)  
"Some of the officials in 1994 checked our ballots before we put them in the box" (15)

### ***Voter Education Needs***

#### ***Varying Levels Of Voter Education Needs***

Voter education needs for the 1999 South African election are manifestly different for the first-time and second-time voters, the findings from these focus group discussions seem to indicate. Second-time voters would feel reassured by materials that simply restate the process and procedures inside the voting station. They also trust that the ballot will be similar to the one used in 1994. Rural, black voters appear more uncertain about procedures than their urban and metropolitan counterparts. Overall, both first-time and second-time participants express the desire for some form of voter education.

Whilst the white voters in these groups felt no need for voter education, Indian first-timers had some reassurance needs and coloured first-timers, depending on class, had more substantial needs. Judging by these focus group voices, middle class voters may have fewer voter education needs than the rest.

First-time voters in these groups experience uncertainty and political confusion, which could affect their level of turnout. They are more confused than the more experienced voters are. They have less of a party identification or experience of violent state oppression, both of which among the other participants amplify motivation to vote. "Political information" often is more important to the new voters in these groups than "voter education".

### ***Process-Related Voter Education Needs***

Regarding both the voting process and the ballot itself, participants from most demographic and political statuses are in need of affirmation of their existing knowledge, rather than in need of fundamental voter education. Factors such as the ability to make an informed decision about the best party to vote for weighed more heavily with first-time voters than questions about the voting process and about marking the ballot.

First-time voters in these groups voice various information and education needs regarding the processes of registration and voting (see Table 4).

**Table 4**

#### ***The Main Things That First-Timers Wish To know about the Process of Voting***

What procedure do I follow when I have to register?

Why is it important to vote?

Where am I going to vote?

Will things be the same as in 1994? Will we do the same steps?

"They must teach us about the election process, so that we can know the different points to go to while we vote" (7)

"They really need to tell us why it is important for us to vote. We do not really see the point" (11)

"We should also be reminded of the process, so that will know where to go after each step" (5)

### ***Ballot-Related Voter Education Needs***

Should the ballot format change, a range of voters will need appropriate voter education to update and reassure them (see Table 5). The first-timers and many of the more experienced voters share this need.



"We know how to vote. They can just come and refresh our minds" (3)  
 "I do not think there is much that they can help us with now, perhaps just a bit of refreshing people's minds about the voting procedure" (6)  
 "One makes the cross there by the person's head. It is Mandela's head... Next to Mandela's head" (15)  
 "We are certain that we can work the ballot" (20)  
 "We do not know how to vote, and we hope we will have people who will educate us about voting" (7)  
 "I don't understand how to mark the ballot" (11)

**Table 5**

### ***The Things Voters Wish To Know About The Ballot And Marking It***

Where do we start when we go and collect the ballot inside the voting station?

They have to tell the people that they must only choose one person.

Shall we again see the faces on the ballot? What about new faces?

Will we be able to find our party with so many parties saying they will stand?

How do we fold the ballot, or will the officials do it?

Will the officials be able to help me if I get stuck?

### ***The Mock Ballot For First-Timers In The Focus Groups***

The focus group proceedings allocated a slot to conduct a mock ballot in the case of first-time voters. The results showed very few technical errors in these young voters' ballot marking skills.

All of these mock ballot exercises created great excitement in the groups, irrespective of gender, geographics or cultural and language groups. These participants showed pleasure in participating in the exercise.

### ***Preferences For Voter Education Materials***

Consensus prevailed on preferred voter education materials. Participants generally preferred posters to both newspaper style voter information and to comic book styles of materials. All groups prefer colours (bright colours) to black and white. All groups also point to the necessity of making materials accessible both to the illiterate and the literate. They therefore prefer materials that supplement pictures (either photographs or sketches) with the minimum number of words. Clarity of message is regarded as crucial.

Posters that depict the consecutive steps in the voting process were clear favourites. The two top preferences were the 1994 South African Project Vote "voting steps poster" and a Mozambican poster on the voting process. The first is in colour and shows voters going through numbered steps in the voting process inside the polling station. The second depicts the voting process through a series of black-and-white photographs on a contrast-coloured background.

Some of the reasons for these choices included "straight-forward" message, "minimal words", "not too busy", "clearly illustrating the process" and "colourful to make it interesting".

This following discussion amongst the group of women from Canaan, KwaZulu-Natal (17), was typical regarding the preferences for voter education materials. Their preferences were virtually identical to those of the Alexandra, Gauteng, group of first-time voters (7) or the group of Ennerdale first-timers (11). Themes of reconciliation and caring for the elderly also struck chords with a range of participants.

"I like the voting station layout, because illiterate people can also understand the election process" (17)

"I like the poster that shows that the vote will be a secret" (17)

"I like the poster with symbols, because it shows each step of voting" (17)

"I like the one which shows the step-by-step process of the election. It is easy to understand" (7)

"I like the one that shows the photographs with the steps. It is very clear" (7)

"I like the one that shows how they are helping the old people" (7)

"The IEC voting station poster is a very good one. It shows the voting process step-by-step" (11)

"I also like the one that shows the Rainbow Nation voting, and it shows Madiba" (11)

### ***Preferred Voter Education Agencies***

The participants in these groups largely had consensus on which potential voter education agencies are likely to conduct trustworthy voter education. They also agreed about who should stay clear of the tasks.

The participants felt, without exception, that the IEC definitely can be entrusted with conducting voter education (see Table 6). No other potential agency rivalled the IEC in this regard. NGOs rated second after the IEC. Many groups thought the church and religious leaders would also do a good job. A smaller number found the notion of sports and entertainment stars' involvement acceptable. A small number thought local government could be trusted to do the job. All groups were adamant that political parties ought to stay clear of voter education tasks. Some suggested that political parties could be tolerated in this role, only if they will limit themselves strictly to their own members.

**Table 6**

***Hierarchy Of Agencies To Be Trusted In Tasks Of Voter Education***

**HIGHLY POSITIVE FIRST AND DOWN TO DEFINITELY NOT TO BE INVOLVED**

Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)

Radio broadcasts, in the languages most listened to

Non-governmental organizations

Local government officials; teachers

Church and religious leaders

Sport and entertainment stars

Traditional leaders

Television broadcasts

Political parties and their members; civics

"Radio is good, because it reaches all people" (22)

"Radio will be fine. Most of our people are unemployed... They listen to the radio" (11)

"We do not want the political parties in this role. They will teach us about their own organizations and will not give us the opportunity to decide for ourselves" (1)

"We cannot trust the political parties, because they will try to influence people to vote for them" (6)

"NGOs are trustworthy" (22)

"Musicians is a good idea, because they will attract a lot of people" (22)

"Musicians and sports people cannot be trusted, because most of them are known to support certain political parties" (7)

"The civics cannot do the job, because they will be biased towards certain political parties" (7)

"The IEC is independent and they have experience. They are the one who should help us" (5)

"The IEC should, because it does not have links with political parties or with the government" (15)

"We trust the IEC because they are neutral" (6)

"I would trust the IEC, because they have a mandate to oversee the election process" (7)

***Identity Documents And Registration***

Participants in these groups, at the time of the research in October 1998, were divided on the need to register to vote. Some insisted that the 1994 system of no registration and free choice of location to vote were all that was needed. Others saw the need for control over who would be voting as a good reason to register. These participants also supported arguments that registration would make

the process manageable, orderly and efficient. One of the most popular (and spontaneously mentioned) reasons for registration used in these groups was that registration would prevent foreigners from voting in South Africa (see Table 7).

The "magic" of the 1994 election appears as the strongest driving force in the anti-registration camp. What was good enough for 1994, must be good enough for 1999, was the argument.

**Table 7**

***Arguments In Favour Of Identity Documents And Registration***

"It will keep foreigners from voting in our elections"

"It will speed up the process"

"I don't have a problem with registering; we also did it for local elections in 1995"

"They will use computers and that will make the process efficient"

"It will be impossible to tamper with the election results"

Arguments against identity documents and registration

"1994 worked well, why now all of these measures?"

"It is a waste of time, because the officials don't even check whether people are registered"

"At this time (October 1998), we don't even know what type of document they want"

"These documents may get lost and then we won't be able to vote"

"Some people then will be denied the chance to choose their government"

"Mistakes are made in the processing of the applications"

"It is causing fighting because the old Venda book now is not good enough"

**PREVENTING FOREIGNERS FROM VOTING**

"Bar-coded IDs and having to register are good things, because illegal immigrants will not be able to vote. This will help the election to be free and fair" (5)

"We have a lot of foreigners in the country, so we should register so that they cannot vote illegally"  
(15)

## **PREFERENCE FOR THE 1994 MODEL**

"Why should we register now? We never did so in 1994" (6)

"It is useless to register. We will rather do what we did in 1994" (7)

"People do not like to go up and down in order to go and vote" (6)

## **LACK OF TIME AND RESOURCES TO GO AND REGISTER**

"We do not have the time, transport and money to go and register" (6)

"The IEC will have to go to people's houses if they want many people to register" (6)

"I would prefer the IEC to come to our houses, because the people work and they are very busy" (15)

## APPENDIX 1: DISCUSSION GUIDE



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