

CHAPTER 3

ADDITIONAL SURVEY FINDINGS

This chapter presents additional detail on survey results regarding the ‘supply’ and ‘demand’ sides of voter participation. The aim is to provide wider descriptive coverage of the issues raised in chapter 2. The discussion focuses on three major themes—the relationship between local socioeconomic development and participation, demographic breakdowns of self-reported participation patterns, and reasons given for not voting. The primary focus is on the 1999 national election—that is, the findings are based on what respondents in the survey conducted in late 2001 said about their participation in the 1999 election. The 1999 election (rather than the 2000 municipal election) was chosen because it is arguably most relevant precedent to inform preparations for the upcoming 2004 national election. Readers interested in data specific to the 2000 election—or in more comprehensive survey and focus group findings—may wish to consult the separate technical summary report.

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT AND VOTER PARTICIPATION

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The first step in assessing the relationship between local development and voter participation is to compile a simple measure of the perceived prevalence of development initiatives. Survey respondents were asked to describe socioeconomic developments in their areas during the past five years. More than half (54 percent) could name at least one development initiative.

Because the survey sample was stratified to include wards with different participation rates and degrees of party-political diversity, links between perceived socioeconomic development and local electoral characteristics can readily be examined. Figure 3 presents the percentage of respondents in different types of wards who reported at least one local development initiative during the past five years. The left side of the figure breaks down perceptions of development by ward voting rates. Wards were classified into three roughly equally sized categories based on official participation figures. The pattern shows a clear positive relationship between ward participation and perceptions of local development initiatives—with 53 percent in low-participation wards reporting development, rising slightly to 55 percent in medium-participation wards, and to 63 percent in high-participation wards. Meanwhile, the right side of figure 3 presents perceptions of development by ward party support patterns, with wards categorized as either politically homogenous or heterogeneous. Homogeneous wards are those in which any one party receives the vast majority of votes cast, while in heterogeneous wards support is spread more widely across parties. Those in homogeneous wards are more likely (57 percent) to report local development initiatives than their counterparts in heterogeneous wards are (53 percent).

The survey thus reveals modest positive correlations among perceived local development, voter participation, and party-political homogeneity. The data do not, however, indicate the direction of

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causality. For example, while wards with greater perceived development are also characterized by greater political homogeneity, the data do not reveal whether a ward's overwhelming support for any one party attracts development initiatives, or whether development initiatives draw voters toward a single party.

Because the correlations between local development and ward electoral characteristics are weak, they cannot account for major differences in participation on their own. A thorough explanation must also look elsewhere. The next section examines gender, age, and race breakdowns of reported participation in the 1999 national election.

PARTICIPATION BY GENDER, AGE, AND RACE

Given the diversity of South African society, it is useful to describe differences in average participation rates within specific demographic segments of the population. This section presents self-reported survey data on voter participation in the 1999 election—disaggregated by gender, age, and race. Two important caveats apply to the data. First, while demographic categories may clarify the importance of some social differences, they may also obscure others. For example, a gender breakdown of voter participation reveals some generic differences between South African women and men, but it simultaneously ‘averages away’ diversity among women and among men. Second, the survey data yield a self-reported participation rate that significantly exceeds the actual participation rate—with some respondents who did not vote told interviewers that they did. Such participation overreporting is not a unique shortcoming of this study. In fact, it is one of the most common measurement errors in surveys throughout the world.¹ A particular

¹Robert F. Belli, Michael W. Traugott, Margaret Young, and

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problem is that overreporting may not be spread equally throughout the sample, and uneven overreporting may either exaggerate or mask actual participation differences between specific groups.

Figure 4 reports self-reported participation in the 1999 national election by gender, age, and race. On the left, the gender breakdown shows a higher voting rate for women (81 percent) than for men (75 percent). These results contradict stereotypes that women are less likely to participate than men, but they also leave open the possibility of substantial differences in participation among women of different social strata. Moving to the centre of the figure, the comparison of voting rates between youth (defined as those between 18 and 26 years old in 1999) and other adults reveals a substantial shortfall. Youth participating at 57 percent, while the rate for the rest of the voting-age population is 83 percent. Reasons for this shortfall are discussed more fully in the next section of the chapter. Finally, the right side of figure 4 gives self-reported voting rates by racial category. In the survey, those classified as African reported participating at the highest rate (81 percent), with the rate for other groups averaging about 10 percent lower. Yet studies drawing upon 'hard' electoral data suggest that these results exaggerate racial differences in participation rates.²

REASONS FOR NOT VOTING

Katherine A. McGonagle, 'Reducing Vote Overreporting in Surveys: Social Desirability, Memory Failure, and Source Monitoring,' *Public Opinion Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 90-108.

²Preliminary analysis of local social and electoral profiles suggest that, for example, average participation rates for Africans and whites are extremely similar. Also see Rod Alence and Michael O'Donovan, 'If South Africa's Second Democratic Election Had Been Held in March 1999: A Simulation of Participation and Party Support Patterns,' paper presented in HSRC seminar on quantitative research, 28 May 1999.

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Survey respondents who reported not voting in 1999 were asked to give the main reason they did not go to the polls. In this section, the reasons are tabulated against social criteria—first racial categories, then age (youth), and finally urban versus rural residence. These tables shed additional light on the balance between ‘supply’ and ‘demand’ side explanations for non-participation.

Table 1. Stated reasons for not voting in 1999, by racial category.

Stated reasons for not voting in 1999 (column percentages)	racial categories				Row total
	African	‘Coloured’	Indian/Asian	White	
ID problems	35	15	40	23	30
Vote would not make a difference	35	20	43	22	31
Not interested	8	42	8	24	16
Outside voting district	3	2	0	11	4
Queues too long	4	4	0	2	4
Voting station too far away	3	3	9	2	2
Feared violence	0	0	0	0	0
Unspecified	11	14	0	16	12
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Column totals may not add exactly to 100 percent due to rounding.

Table 1 presents the racial breakdown of reasons for not voting. The rightmost column gives the row totals, which represent the overall percentage of declared nonvoters who selected each reason. The two items at the top of the list are not having the correct (or any) identity document for registration (30 percent) and the belief that one’s vote would not make a

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difference (31 percent). Next is a lack of interest in the election (16 percent). These top three items account for more than three-fourths of all reasons for not voting. Other factors are much less frequently mentioned—including the fear of violence, at below 0.5 percent.

For most racial categories, reasons for not voting were roughly evenly split between the ‘demand’ and ‘supply’ sides. Among Africans, two reasons dominated—ID problems (35 percent) and the belief that voting would not make a difference (35 percent). A similar pattern emerges for Indian/Asian nonvoters (despite a small sample size), with IDs at 40 percent and the view that voting would not make a difference at 43 percent. Among white nonvoters, ID books were less often the main concern (23 percent)—although practical complications related to being outside one’s voting district on election day (11 percent) bring the importance of ‘supply-side’ factors for white nonvoters close to the norm. The reasons given by ‘coloured’ nonvoters break most clearly from the general pattern—with the ‘demand-side’ factors of disinterest (42 percent) and the belief that voting would not make a difference (20 percent) dominating.

Table 2 presents a comparison of reasons for not voting between youth (18 to 26 years old in 1999) and the rest of the voting-age population. This comparison is particularly interesting considering the substantial shortfall in self-reported youth participation in figure 4. Popular accounts of the failure of the youth to vote at higher rates invoke demand-side motivational factors such as ‘apathy.’ However, the youth’s own stated reasons for not voting directly contradict this view—with supply-side obstacles to participation (especially ID problems (49 percent)) dominating. Only about one third of non-voting youth cited the belief that voting would not make a difference (23 percent) or disinterest (10 percent) as reasons for not participating—much less than the comparable fraction of the rest of the voting-age population. If the youth

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are taken at their word, efforts to improve their low participation rate should tackle supply-side obstacles to registration—and especially the acquisition of identity documents.

Table 2. Stated reasons for not voting in 1999, by age category.

Stated reasons for not voting in 1999 (column percentages)	age categories		Row total
	youth, 18 to 26 years old	other adults	
ID problems	49	22	30
Vote would not make a difference	23	34	31
Not interested	10	19	16
Outside voting district	2	6	4
Queues too long	2	4	4
Voting station too far away	2	3	2
Feared violence	0	0	0
Unspecified	12	12	12
TOTAL	100	100	100

Note: Column totals may not add exactly to 100 percent due to rounding.

Working from the apparently false premise that the youth are unusually politically apathetic will lead inappropriate strategies to improve participation.

The final table on reasons for not voting is table 3, which compares nonvoters in rural and urban areas. The previous chapter presented anecdotal evidence from focus group interviews suggesting that registration-related difficulties are more pervasive in rural areas—where a combination of long distances and weak physical and administrative infrastructure reduces the accessibility of registration points. This implies that supply-side factors should feature prominently as reasons for not voting given by rural residents. Table 3

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Table 3. Stated reasons for not voting in 1999, by area type.

Stated reasons for not voting in 1999 (column percentages)	area types		Row total
	rural	urban	
ID problems	41	26	30
Vote would not make a difference	28	31	31
Not interested	7	20	16
Outside voting district	2	5	4
Queues too long	3	4	4
Voting station too far away	3	2	2
Feared violence	0	0	0
Unspecified	15	11	12
TOTAL	100	100	100

Note: Column totals may not add exactly to 100 percent due to rounding.

confirms this expectation. Identity document problems were identified by 41 percent of rural nonvoters as their main reason for not going to the polls, while the figure for urban nonvoters is only 26 percent. Meanwhile, rural nonvoters were much less likely to cite a lack of interest (7 percent) than their urban counterparts were (20 percent). As with the youth, practical obstacles to participation account for an unusually large share of non-voting in rural areas. However, while it is likely that the youth's problem is linked specifically to low prevalence of identity documents, bar-coded ID prevalence among eligible voters in rural areas is very similar to the national average.³ For rural residents, ID difficulties appear to be rooted more in difficulties acquiring them than in lower *ex ante* prevalence rates.

³Johan Olivier and others, 'The Extent to which Eligible Voters are in Possession of SA Identity Documents: National Survey Report,' HSRC report to the IEC (30 July 1998): 14). The problem of IDs among rural residents thus appears to be rooted more in difficulties acquiring them than in lower *ex ante* prevalence rates.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has offered additional descriptive detail on survey findings regarding the ‘supply’ and ‘demand’ sides of voter participation. Major themes covered include the relationship between local socioeconomic development and participation, demographic breakdowns of self-reported participation rates, and reasons for not voting. The discussion of local development and participation showed a modest positive correlation between perceived development initiatives and ward-level voting rates. The analysis of registration patterns by gender, age, and race yielded a notable finding—confirming a substantial shortfall of youth participation compared with the rest of the voting-age population. This finding was followed up in the section on reasons for not voting. The section showed that the youth most often cite registration difficulties (especially those related to identity documents) as the main obstacle to participation—contradicting popular stereotypes about the politically ‘apathetic’ youth. Their reasons for not voting bear a clear resemblance to those offered by rural residents, who also complain frequently about supply-side problems related to voter registration.

An important limitation of the survey data is that respondents significantly overreported participation in the 1999 election. If overreporting is concentrated in specific segments of the sample, it can potentially distort estimates of participation patterns. Also, respondents who incorrectly claimed to have voted in 1999 were excluded from the analysis of reasons for not voting. Participation overreporting is not unique to South Africa nor to this survey. However, awareness of its existence highlights the need to seek other kinds of data

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on voter participation. In chapter 4, the substantive focus on supply-side obstacles to participation is continued, but using an original data set of local social and electoral profiles—compiled by linking census information to the IEC’s extensive collection of ‘hard’ electoral data.