

Engaging the SA youth vote

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Thirty years since the country's first democratic election, South Africa's 2024 national and provincial elections will play out in times deeply troubled by an unrelenting energy crisis, sustained high inflation, high crime and high unemployment, rampant corruption, and water scarcity. There are significant doubts that the country's political parties and its voters are going to meet the moment in arguably the most significant elections since 1994.



In the run-up to the 2024 elections, we're going to frequently see polling data emerging from all sides. However, The SA Voter Sentiment Report comes out of a survey that is more nuanced and multi-dimensional than typical polling research. While the full report will only be released next year, the survey has already highlighted a glaring gap in youth representation within the registered voter base. Less than 20% of South Africans aged 18 to 19 years and only 40% of the 20 to 29 age group are registered voters. There are almost seven million unregistered voters under 30 years and close to 11 million unregistered voters under 40 years of age. This data underscores a substantial opportunity and highlights the urgent need to mobilise the youth vote.

Conducted in the final three months of 2023, the SA Voter Sentiment Survey is the result of a collaboration between the WhyFive Insights, well known for their annual BrandMapp consumer landscape study, MoyaApp, the data free super app used by millions of South Africans, and SilverstoneCIS with their omni-channel mobile first research platform, FlashPanel.

According to Brandon de Kock, WhyFive's director of storytelling: "The SA Voter Sentiment Survey is a fascinating deep dive into the perceptions, needs and drivers that will affect voter behaviour. As South African businesses with a deep interest in the future of our country, we have been motivated by a desire to look deeper than the ballot box and determine the possible motivations behind every 'X' on each piece of paper that dictates who gets to steer the ship for the next cycle. Our intention was to measure the mindset and drivers behind voter decision-making, rather than possible results. We aimed to investigate what the big shifts might be in the landscape, and just how big or small the surprises may be that lie in store."

12,668 eligible South African voters participated in the SA Voter Sentiment Survey through diverse channels, including

email, SMS, and WhatsApp. De Kock says: "What is unique is that this outreach to voters was entirely through politically unaffiliated bases like the MoyaApp database and SilverstoneCIS' FlashPanel respondent databases. This methodology ensured a near-random total raw sample fully inclusive of our rural populations, providing a comprehensive view of voter sentiments."

De Kock emphasises that the chronically low levels of voter registration amongst the youth represents a significant wild card in the 2024 elections. He says: "It is evident that neglecting the youth demographic not only overlooks a significant portion of the electorate but also disregards the diverse perspectives, aspirations, and concerns that the youth bring to the political landscape."

"To address this imbalance and harness the power of the youth vote, intentional efforts are needed to seriously roll out voter education and increase youth voter registration, raising awareness about the importance of political engagement, and addressing issues pertinent to our younger demographic. It's likely that there is going to be an advantage to those who are successful in engaging young voters."

Next year will see the release of the comprehensive SA Voter Sentiment Survey which aims to put a finger on the pulse of not just how South Africans may vote, but what's behind their voting choices.

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