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DEMOCRACY, LIBERATION AND THE VOTE IN SOUTH AFRICA'S FIRST DEMOCRATIC ELECTION: THE MATLA TRUST VOTER EDUCATION SURVEY

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DEMOCRACY, LIBERATION AND THE VOTE IN SOUTH AFRICA'S FIRST DEMOCRATIC ELECTION: THE MATLA TRUST VOTER EDUCATION SURVEY

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ABSTRACT:
This case study of the Matla Trust Voter Education Research project analyses voting-related attitudes in the run-up to South Africa's 1994 election. The study was aimed at the empowerment of voters. Empowerment is defined along the lines of the motivation and the skills to participate in the election. The research methodology used, was qualitative focus groups and a major, quantitative, baseline attitude survey. The latter was designed to reflect the attitudes of the whole of the South African electorate. It was unique in that it did detailed regional and demographic comparisons. The research illuminates the meaning which South African voters attached to, and feelings they had about, voting, elections and democracy. The study also identifies the "demographic fault lines" in empowerment to vote and to participate. The paper first investigates the extent of motivation to vote and reasons for voting. Motivation was high, also well before the election. The reasons for voting shed light on the meaning attached to democracy and voting. They also give important information on the expectations the voters have of a new government. The research showed systematic demographic disempowerment in terms of voting skills. Whilst indications are that these were overcome in a largely successful April 1994 election, continued work is required to advance empowerment for wider political participation. The paper also provisionally investigates some implications of this case study for the deepening of democracy in South Africa.

FRAMEWORK:

1. Voter education, empowerment, and the Matla Research Project
2. Research methodology
3. Expectations and anticipation of the elections
4. Disempowerment and the challenges to voter education
5. Assessment of participation outcomes
6. The implications for democracy

Notes, References, Appendices

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1. VOTER EDUCATION, EMPOWERMENT, AND THE MATLA RESEARCH PROJECT[1]

The success of South Africa's 1994 election could not be taken for granted. Inevitably it would be the much vaunted liberation election. But in the approximately eighteen months prior to the election there was ample evidence that voters had become weary of the long and frustrating transition, and that their expectations were being tempered by violence. The mood of the electorate had two major currents: anticipation and expectations versus disempowerment through lack of motivation, feelings of fear, and through the absence of voting skills.

The voter education challenges for the purposes of this research project were identified on two levels. The process had to start with an assessment of both the motivation and the skills to vote.[2] The tasks would be, first, to prepare the electorate by teaching voting skills, both ballot literacy and process knowledge, and to facilitate identity document dissemination. Second, the task would be to help nurture a high voter turnout. This would help ensure the legitimacy of the elections. The motivation to participate builds on the empowerment[3] skills. To achieve a high turnout it would be necessary to motivate voters who were unsure whether they would vote, as well as to reassure the uncertain turnouts who had specific constraints. Motivation for participation equally is a form of empowerment. Through participation voters express their needs and potentially become aware of how governments act (or do not) on these needs. We therefore talk about a mutually strengthening, symbiotic relationship between motivation to vote and equipping people with voting skills.

These voter education challenges could only be met if voter education agencies themselves were empowered through thorough research. Such research would have to identify the feelings and needs of the electorate. It would also have to be specific and detailed enough to enable voter educators to develop detailed and targeted strategies for empowerment and motivation. It was in this context that Matla Trust commissioned Research Initiatives, in cooperation with Marketing & Media Research and Decision Surveys International, to undertake a major three phase research project. This project used a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to identify the possible stumbling blocks in the way of successful elections.

This paper therefore presents a case study of voting-related attitudes and skills in the run-up to the 26-29 April 1994 South African election. The Matla Voter Education Research Project is unique in that it did detailed and systematic regional and demographic analyses of issues affecting the empowerment of voters. It is also one of the biggest voter education surveys conducted in preparation for the election. It informed the work of both Matla Trust (the most prominent of the South African voter education agencies) and the broader Independent Forum for Electoral Education (IFEE).[4]

The objectives of this paper are threefold. First, it hopes to promote an understanding of the "uncertain voters", of their concerns, fears and feelings about voting. It is important to understand how these relate to the mood in the country. Second, the paper works towards a detailed understanding of how motivation to participate and voting skills relate to the empowerment of the South African electorate. Third, the paper assesses some implications of this case study for the further extension of democratic political participation, and for the

deepening of democracy in South Africa. (The details and dynamics of the election itself, and the details of voter education activities which were undertaken on the basis of this research data, fall outside the ambit of this case study.)

The paper focuses on the two major parts of the Matla Voter Education Research Project. First, it reports on the qualitative findings of the focus groups conducted in late 1992. These groups concentrated on the uncommitted[5] voters who were uncertain voter turnouts. Their feelings and motivations were the subject for in-depth analyses. Understanding the extent and possible reasons for abstention among the uncommitted voters was an important objective. The uncertain voters, for instance, had major misgivings about voting. Closer to the election motivation of the voters, in general, built up and both specific expectations and a mood of great anticipation emerged. This is also elaborated.

Second, this paper focuses on the 8000 Voter Education Baseline Survey. The objective of this phase of the research project was to facilitate a detailed understanding of voter empowerment differences between regions, and between a variety of demographic groups within each of the regions. Possible abstention because of lack of ballot literacy, confusion about the voting process, or lack of facilitating identity documents, had to be countered. Apart from the detailed comparisons, the survey would also provide the authoritative national picture of the electorate.[6] Precise targeting for voter education programmes could flow from such detailed understanding. Special attention is given to demographic facets of motivational and skills disempowerment, especially along the lines of gender, age education, and level of urbanisation. We investigate, for instance, whether women, either the young or the old, people from less advantaged formal education backgrounds, or from rural areas, were systematically disempowered in terms of potential participation in the election. Detailed information is provided on how the voting issues of intention to vote and varying motivations to vote, belief in secrecy of the ballot, access to the mass media, ballot literacy, and the possession of identity documents were affected by demographic characteristics.

The relevance of the Matla research data extends beyond the challenges of conducting legitimate elections and empowering the new electorate for voting. The research also focused on what the election and voting meant to the new electorate. In the analysis of reasons why people wanted to vote, or why they wanted to abstain, information was derived which could assist in the further development of democracy in South Africa. It indicates the close association in voters' minds between liberation-democracy-equal rights on the one hand, and the improvement of social conditions on the other hand. The data could leave no political party or government in doubt about the extent of action required to advance and develop democracy in South Africa. In the current phase of South Africa's transition we have achieved voting and procedural democracy. For the further development of democracy, there are two broad requirements. First, people need to experience an improvement in their social and economic lives. The Matla research data helps define the parameters of what South Africans expect their votes to signify to a new government. Second, there needs to be empowerment for continuous participation, beyond the act of voting. To achieve this, the teaching of the skills to participate in the new system of government, as well as the dissemination of issue knowledge, are required.

The rest of this paper first elaborates on the research methodology of the project, then assesses the motivation for voting and meaning attached to the process, and after that

addresses the nature and extent of obstacles to empowerment and participation. In conclusion, some of the implications of this research project for the development and consolidation of democracy in South Africa are considered.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: FOCUS GROUPS AND BASELINE SURVEY

The Matla Trust Voter Education Research Project extended from 1992 into 1994. The analysis employed an eight region specification of South Africa (the regional demarcations at the time of the research).[7] Where directly comparable data from other surveys were available, these are referred to in this paper.

The two crucial phases of the Matla project were the qualitative focus groups (October to December 1992) at the beginning of the research, and the quantitative baseline national survey at the culmination of the project (June 1993-March 1994). The 1992 focus groups provided an in-depth understanding of the major reasons why some black South Africans who would qualify to vote were either reluctant or declared a determination not to vote.

The planning and implementation of the focus groups:[8]
This phase of qualitative research focused on voters who had no strong party identification and were not motivated to vote. The objective was to gain an in-depth understanding of possible abstention in the election. The focus therefore was on the uncommitted, changeable (swing) voters.

A total of 24 focus groups were conducted with uncommitted voters. Like focus groups generally, these groups entailed in-depth, qualitative analyses of group discussions of six to eight people. The participants were carefully selected, using a recruitment questionnaire. Considerations in recruitment were gender, age, employment status, race, language, urban versus rural, and voter intention. The rural groups were drawn from the then Lebowa and Gazankulu areas, and the Orange Free State, and the urban groups from Johannesburg/Soweto, Durban and surrounding areas, and Cape Town and Paarl. Each of the focus groups was demographically compatible, for instance gender homogenous, as well as age and social status compatible. In the recruitment interview potential participants were only told that the discussion would focus on socio-political issues. This was to ensure that they would not "rehearse" issues (an important consideration in focus group research). The focus groups were conducted by experienced moderators employed by DSI. The moderators were demographically similar to the participants. The moderators were all experienced and underwent thorough briefings. They used a structured discussion guide with specific time allocations for particular sections. The discussion guide was developed out of team workshops from August to October 1992 (see Appendix 1 for the themes that were dealt with). The discussions lasted just over two hours, and participants received a small remuneration.

The planning and implementation of the baseline survey:
The Baseline Survey entailed the individual, personal interviewing of respondents, using a structured questionnaire (see Appendix 1 for a list of question themes). There were also certain questions where respondents were asked to give spontaneous answers. These were recorded by the interviewers. The quantitative research method of this stage of the research

process was essential, because the researchers wished to draw detailed comparisons between regions. It was also the appropriate research methodology, because we had to get the authoritative picture, representative of the total South African electorate.

A number of challenges had to be overcome to bring the **baseline survey** to fruition. There was no single set of reliable data from which the sample could be drawn. Rural black South Africans in the past were only, marginally, surveyed for commercial concerns. There were few precedents to use to gain a representative sample for election issues.[9] Great care had to be taken to include this rural population in the sample, in proportion to its estimated size in the overall population. Field workers had to go to great lengths to ensure access, often in difficult and dangerous circumstances. Because of high levels of illiteracy and sometimes divergent cultures, the formulation of questions also demanded great care. The problems were overcome through many months of team work between Matla, Research Initiatives, Marketing & Media Research (MMR) and Decision Surveys International (DSI).

The **interviews** were conducted by trained DSI interviewers, wherever possible in the respondents' homes. Interviewers received detailed briefings before the start of fieldwork. Field supervisors did daily checks on the interviews and a minimum of 20% were back-checked. Continuous monitoring ensured uniformity of approach. All interviewers were selected and assigned to be demographically compatible with the people who were to be interviewed.

A standard, structured **questionnaire** was used for all interviews. The response of each individual was entered on a separate questionnaire. The questionnaire was translated into English, Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho and Afrikaans, and the respondents were interviewed in their home languages, or in the language of their choice. The questionnaire was extensively piloted and refined prior to the start of the fieldwork.

The **sampling procedure** started with the universe being defined as all men and women aged 17 years or older, who were South African citizens and would qualify to vote on reaching 18 years by the time of the election. The sample was an area stratified random sample. In a few areas where conditions on the ground (especially violence) made it impossible to conduct a random sample, sampling was done by the quota method. This was necessary in parts of the East Rand and the Vaal Triangle. In such cases, respondents would be interviewed around their places of work. Within the specified parameters, the sample was drawn by an independent research consultant, who also assisted in determining the appropriate weights. The margin of error for the current analysis was estimated at 3% maximum for national level analyses. On the regional level it would be 6-7% maximum.

Interviews with a total of 8004 South African voters were used for this analysis. The interviewing was done in the period from mid-July until the end of August 1994. By race diversification, 4652 interviews were conducted with African voters, 1600 with coloured voters, 800 with Indian voters and 1600 with white voters. Some measure of proportionality was maintained in deciding the number of interviews in racial sectors. Caution had to be taken that each sector would remain big enough to be analysed. To illustrate the regional spread of interviews, among Africans 952 interviews were conducted with PWV voters, 581 in the Northern Transvaal, 375 in the Northwest, 382 in the Eastern Transvaal, 382 in the Western Cape, 752 in the Eastern cape, 379 in the Orange Free State, and 849 in Natal. All

regions and racial sectors were weighted to the appropriate proportion of the population in that region. In drawing the sample, it was also ensured that it would reflect the national population in distribution between metropolitan, urban and rural.

Data interpretation was facilitated through a large number of research team workshops, which dealt with issues ranging from defining data runs, to detailed analyses and report designs. The final research report was presented at a Matla Trust March 1994 media conference.

In the interpretation of data the four South African race groups were analysed separately. Preliminary analyses showed racially diversified trends, for instance very different needs for voter education or feelings about elections. Ignoring these differences would have meant equalising divergent trends and ignoring specific needs. Within race groups we further distinguished between a variety of demographic categories, including gender differences, age and income groups, and different levels of formal education.

Much of the current paper's data interpretation will be substantiated through the provision of tables and diagrams. However, the regionally diversified analysis implies the usage of a very large number of tables or diagrams. Consequently, only key ones are incorporated into this paper, in Appendix 2 (diagrams) and Appendix 3 (tables). Table and diagram numbers are indicated in the text. Although these diagrams and tables facilitate more detailed understandings, the reading of the text does not depend on the simultaneous scanning of the tables.

3. MOTIVATION TO VOTE AND WHAT THE VOTE MEANT

From early on in the research project there was evidence that the new South African electorate had high levels of anticipation and were highly motivated to participate in the April 1994 elections. They clearly felt highly empowered on the motivational level, even if they were still lacking voting skills. There were political, demographic and race variations, but the large majority had little doubt that they would participate.

The Matla research findings on the levels of motivation to vote and the reasons why people thought it would be important to vote provide useful information on the meaning attached to voting. It tells us why turnout was high in the April election. Simultaneously, it informs us on the expectations of the voters -- and therefore on what their demands on the new government would be. These are the expectations and demands that the South African government will have to act on in order to give substance to "the vote". It is this government action or inaction that will help establish or undermine trust in and legitimacy of representative democracy.

This section first analyses the Matla Focus Group findings on reasons why even politically uncommitted voters, in the early pre-election period of November to December 1992, were determined to bring out their votes. This determination emerged, despite otherwise highly ambivalent feelings and in some cases even a fear of voting. The section then assesses national trends in the Matla Baseline Survey on vote intention, and briefly compares these

with two comparable survey studies. Following that, it investigates regional, demographic and race sector variations in motivation and reasons for voting.[10]

THE FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH ON MOTIVATION AND VOTING

"The coming of elections would be like the time when the bird is being set free ..." These words conveyed the general feeling about elections among participants in the focus groups. Equally remarkable, is that sentiments like these were expressed despite the focus group participants not being committed political party supporters, and despite the fact that they also harboured many fears, cynicism and confusion regarding the elections (see Section 4).

Focus group participants talked about participation in elections in terms of "costs" (disadvantages, fear) and "benefits" (blessings, gains). The "costs" (Section 4) could stand in the way of participation in the elections. The "benefits" could drive them to participate, despite adverse conditions. A high proportion of focus group participants at that 1992 stage thought that the costs of voting outweighed the benefits. The costs and the benefits at that stage, however, still existed side-by-side, without being specifically weighed up against each other. In the focus groups the same people would sometimes talk about their great anticipation and expectations, and their fears and doubts about elections. These contradictions probably were largely the result of the fact that elections were still more than a year away, disempowerment because of lacking voting knowledge and skills, and the often despondent mood of that period in South African history.

In describing their expectations of a democratically elected government, the focus group participants used extremely rich, flowing language. Some of the images that were called up were: "jubilation", "happiness", "black victory", "progress", "significant change", "a better future for my children", "election of my ideal leader", etc.

Some quotations demonstrate the mood: "It will be like a wild bird set free" (middle class coloured man, Cape Town); "Maybe elections will make us sleep at night ... Maybe God will help us" (older African woman, Lebowa); "I will be mad with happiness, I's even break down all these shacks" (African working class man, Soweto). Such expectations were present, in varying degrees, in all the focus groups.

The major anticipated "benefit" of voting was found in the positive expectations of a democratic government. Three kinds of positive expectations emerged: The prospect of democracy, choice, participation and citizenship; the prospect of a black, broadly sympathetic government in power; and the prospect of specific material benefits, or improvement in social conditions, accruing from a new government, e.g. education, food, housing.

In the first category an English-speaking coloured man from Cape Town, said: "An election will mean I will be a South African, not just a person." In the second category, a typical statement: "We shall vote to get ourselves a government that will give us a new life" (African working class man, Soweto), and "Maybe someone will tell the government about us and something would be done" (African male farm worker, OFS). In the third category, there were elaborate group discussions. An African woman from Gazankulu had no doubts: "I'll vote for Mandela. He will give me a job". Or, "People are starving. Maybe the new

government will help provide us with something to eat" (African man, Gazankulu), and "Maybe it will make blacks own farms too ... It might also bring luxury like better housing and jobs, better salaries as well" (African woman, Lebowa). It was mainly coloured and Indian participants who cautioned against expectations being too high. According to this Indian man, Durban: "An election will not bring immediate change. It will take around ten years to make this country really stable again."

THE BASELINE SURVEY RESEARCH ON EMPOWERMENT THROUGH MOTIVATION

As South Africa moved closer to the election, there emerged a clear, widespread commitment to vote. The political mood in the country changed. Violence and often agonizing negotiations persisted. But as the advent of the elections drew closer, South Africa's new electorate increasingly showed a determination to vote. They were also very clear about why they would want to vote. The determination was especially pronounced for African voters. Later in the election campaign, as showed in subsequent surveys, the commitment to vote amongst coloured and Indian voters rose.[11]

In this section I analyse this enthusiasm for, and expectations of, elections, as expressed in the quantitative components of the Matla Baseline Survey. In doing this, we should bear in mind that high motivation to vote could still fail to become translated into legitimate election outcomes. For instance, high levels of spoilt ballots could make people feel that they "had been cheated", or many who want to vote could be turned away because of a lack of identity documents, or many could still abstain because they fear intimidation, violence, the effects of "known voting", or because of a lack of voting skills (see Section 4).

Vote intention:
From the baseline research, conducted in July to August 1994, it became clear that South Africa was potentially going to see a typically high liberation election turnout. A large majority of African (83%) and white (85%) voters declared that they would vote "if the election took place tomorrow". Small majorities of coloured (50%) and Indian (55%) voters wanted to vote at that stage. (See Diagram 1, Appendix 2.)

The potential for an even larger turnout was indicated by the fact that, in addition the above, 11% of African voters did not rule out the possibility that they might vote. This applied to 31% of coloured, 22% of Indian, and 7% of white voters. Only 6% African and 8% white were determined that they would not vote. The corresponding percentage for coloured voters was 19% and for Indian 23%. Considering the respective sizes of racial sectors of the electorate (African 72%, coloured 9%, Indian 3%, and white 16%) a high percentage poll could be expected.

These turnout findings can usefully be compared to subsequent surveys which were conducted by other research agencies. Different timing of the research, different samples and sample sizes, varying question formulations, and progress with voter education and party political campaigns help account for the differences. Changing trends also reflect the changing overall mood in the country. For instance, the research by the Institute for Multi-Party Democracy (IMPD, early March 1994), implemented in conjunction with the Human Sciences Research

Council, found that 84% of African, 77% of coloured, 65% of Indian, and 76% of white voters definitely intended voting. Additional percentages said they might. CASE (April 1994) tracking research for the Independent Forum for Electoral Education found that 86% of Africans intended voting, compared to 81% of coloureds at that stage. These findings differ from the Matla Baseline Study mainly in the area of coloured vote intention (which rose closer to the election). The Matla Baseline Study's findings on reasons for possibly not voting had indicated the potential for this consolidation. The HSRC (1994:3), on the basis of a 2286 February 1994 poll, safely estimated that between 66% and 93% of the voting population would vote.

A regional comparison of vote intention among African voters in the Matla Baseline Survey showed that in all regions large percentages of African voters wanted to vote, generally ranging from 80-percent upward. The two exceptions were the Eastern Transvaal and Natal (74% in each case) (also see the analysis of reasons for not wanting to vote, Section 4). The regions with the highest African vote intention were the Western and the Eastern Cape, 95% and 93%, respectively. In Natal there was a high uncertainty factor. A total of 20% said they were not sure whether they would vote or not. (See Table 1, Appendix 2.)

A demographic and regional comparison of vote intention mostly showed a mutual reinforcement between different demographic components of disempowerment. As alluded to in the Introduction, the most disempowered in terms of voting skills and motivation tend to be the reinforcing demographic categories of women, older people, those with lower education, and predominantly in rural areas. In most regions **gender** strongly differentiated between those who intended voting or not. The gender gap in most regions was around 10%. A drastic aggravation was the Eastern Transvaal, where 23% more men than women declared that they intended voting. There were varying trends regarding age and vote intention. In the Northern and Eastern Transvaal, as well as the Free State and Natal, the two younger age groups were much more likely than the 50+ year-olds to want to vote. **Education** fairly consistently discriminated between those who wanted to vote or not. In all cases but the Western and the Eastern Cape, and the Northwest (in this case around 6%), those formally educated up to Standard 4[12] would be at least 10% less likely to vote. The **level of urbanisation** made a big difference in intention to vote in the OFS, Natal and the Eastern Transvaal. The greater the distance from the metropolitan areas of the country, the less likely the voters in these regions were to say that they would vote.[13]

Reasons for voting:

A preliminary comparison of reasons for wanting to vote showed divergent trends between African, coloured, Indian and white voters. The five top reasons given by African voters were: freedom, equal rights or democracy; more jobs; better living conditions; to get a government of choice; and to end apartheid or discrimination. There were some similarities between the motivations of coloured and Indian voters. For coloured voters the top three motivations were a better life for their families, followed by equal rights or democracy, and then peace. Peace was the most important consideration for Indian voters, followed by a better life for their families and democracy/equal rights. White voters appeared to be driven by a very different dynamic. First came citizen duty, then to get a government of their own choice, and a better life for their families. The fourth most important white motivation for voting was to "prevent black government". (See Table 2, Appendix 3.)

Across all regions, African voters most consistently stated reasons related to the achievement of freedom and democracy. In reply to the question "What is the most important reasons why you want to vote?" (a follow-up question after respondents had indicated that they wanted to vote in the election), 48% of African voters mentioned reasons related to the achievement of freedom, democracy and power.

Not far behind the democracy/liberation answer, was "material improvement" - explicitly given as the most important reason to vote. A total of 37% spontaneously cited reasons, either specific or general, that were related to better material conditions. Peace and order reasons were mentioned by 8% of the African voters, and citizen duty by 5%.

Coloured voters, in about equal proportions mentioned freedom/democracy and material improvement, with the latter slightly more prevalent. For Indian voters, democracy considerations were also the most important. This was the case too for white voters, albeit with a different meaning attached. Citizen duty rated very strongly for whites.

There were meaningful **demographic variations**. A regional and demographic comparison of motivations to vote show that certain demographic groupings of voters were much more inclined to name material or social condition reasons. Among the African voters, these tended to be women, older, rural, lower education and low income voters. In the **PWV**, as in other regions, it would predominantly be men, of the younger age groups, with higher education levels, and living in the clearly metropolitan area who cited freedom/democracy/equal rights. In a mostly rural region like the **Northern Transvaal**, the achievement of better living conditions emerged as strong rival for explicit freedom motivations in the overall regional results. The Northwest, the Eastern Transvaal and the Eastern Cape were other regions which provided substantiation of the gender-age-education-urbanisation demographic trend. These trends were not strongly pronounced in the Western Cape. The Orange Free State and Natal were the two regions where the improvement of social conditions, including the creation of jobs, ranked higher than direct liberation motivations. The demographic trends still held.[14]

These spontaneous replies, where respondents could use their own words and emphases to describe their most important motivation to vote, shed light on the magnitude of election turnout (also see Section 5) and on the meaning attached to democracy and voting. The focus groups discussions provided graphic detail on he meaning attached to the vote. No absolute separation between liberation, on the one hand, and improvement of social conditions on the other, should be deduced from the dual categorisation of motivations to vote. The two are closely related. The mentioning of "achievement of power", "getting rights", or "having a sympathetic government" does not exist in a vacuum. They have liberation connotations, and relate to substantive social conditions. For instance, the importance of achieving power lies in the difference this power should make to people's lives. These dynamics will continue to shape the post-elections climate in South Africa.

4. OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLES OF LACK OF MOTIVATION AND DISEMPOWERMENT

Important problems had to be overcome to ensure consistently high motivational and skills empowerment. This section deals with findings on the obstacles of, first, the lack of motivation and, second, the lack of appropriate voting skills as these emerged in the Focus Group and Baseline Studies. One has to bear in mind the interactive, symbiotic relationship between voting skills and motivation. More voting skills would help ensure a higher level of motivation to vote; a high motivation could serve as the encouragement to acquire the necessary voting skills. Together, voting skills and motivation impart the empowerment for participation through voting.

Voting skills disempowerment included the fear of violence, low levels of possession of identity documents, confusion about politics and voting processes, doubts about ballot secrecy, and the lack of ballot literacy. While only some of these challenges were in the direct ambit of voter education functions, voter education agencies could, through a process of educating about both secrecy of the ballot, and the procedures and security measures around campaigning and voting, help reduce the "costs" of voting.

The research reported on in this section strives, first, to give an in-depth picture of the fears and feelings of disempowerment, and second, to specify the extent and dimensions of disempowerment of South Africa's new voters in the period leading up to the election. As in the previous section, I report on both the 1992 Matla Focus Groups and the 1994 Matla Baseline Survey. Two, diverse sets of research data were generated. The Focus Group analysis deals with the "uncertain voters", and the Baseline Survey with a sample representing the total South African voting population.

THE FOCUS GROUP RESULTS ON OBSTACLES

The biggest problems that were identified in the 1992 voter education research were the "mood of the period" and confusion about politics and voting. A mood of despondence, because of the protracted transition and the high incidence of violence, was undermining the anticipation to vote. Fear appeared to be a bigger deterrent than lack of knowledge. At that early stage it became clear that to ensure high participation, voters would have to be reassured about anonymity of voting, as well as personal safety and protection at the time of voting. Many of these reassurances, however, would only be credible in specific circumstances and closer to the election.

The mood among the uncertain voters:
The mood among the uncertain voters (a large proportion of the electorate at that stage) reflected both disillusionment with change up to that time and an impatience for more change. The four major issues on the minds of these uncertain voters were violence (political and criminal), the economy and unemployment, racial injustice, and education. This mood related to the immediate social conditions of the participants. A brief analysis provides vivid contrasts with the expectations of elections outlined in Section 3.

There was a possibility that ongoing violence could alienate these voters from the election process. They strongly resented what they often saw as ongoing, self-interested power struggles between the ANC and the IFP. These struggles were seen to take precedence over the people's concerns about their own lives. African and Indian voters increasingly were wondering about their future. In the words of two African working class men from Durban and Johannesburg: "We are talking about the new South African and yet we are still killing each other. This confuses me. I don't know where we are going" and "People are always talking about the new South Africa. I don't see any change for the better".

The economy was the second most prevalent issue on the minds of the uncertain voters. It aroused discussion in every focus group. The economy was equated with unemployment, and associated with crime, hunger and starvation, poor education and lack of housing. Despair characterised the mood on the economy, especially among the African participants. The words of this African man from Gazankulu and working class woman from Soweto were typical of the mood expressed: "Presently I own nothing, I won't be able to own anything ... I will have to toil until my dying day" and "We are losing hope ..."

Signs of a potential change in the mood emerged in the fact that voters largely associated the lack of progress in politics and social life in South Africa with continuing white dominance of politics. There was a low-key but potent resentment of whites throughout the focus groups. "Things have changed, but I still do the same job, I'm still treated as a black. So the changes have no meaning" (African middle class woman, Johannesburg) or "When a black meets a white, all a black has in mind is fear, because these two nations are enemies" (female African farm worker, Orange Free State). These are experiences that convey a sense of the association of lack of political and social progress with ongoing white domination.

A profound sense of continued racial-economic disempowerment came from African women (at its strongest in rural South Africa). Related, workplace themes were that whites do not pay much, exploit farm labour, and get better jobs on lower qualifications or less experience. For instance: "The white man just watches as the black man sweats, he just stand there and at the end of the day he gets more money" (African working class woman, Durban), or "The ordinary labourers have to pay for the big bosses" (coloured woman, Paarl).

The focus group research showed a strong association between hope for a better future and hope for an improvement in education. It was also especially the women who continuously talked about their hope that better education would at least help to ensure a better future for their children, even if they themselves could not benefit.

Issues in "getting out the vote" of the uncertain voters:
The uncertain voters had serious fears and doubts about two election related issues. Would elections lead to death, intimidation, loss of property? Secondly, will elections have a real effect on their lives? At the time of the research these sentiments were particularly strong among African voters, both women and men, rural and urban, and from all socio-economic classes. It was clear that among African voters there was not a commitment to abstain (such determination was much stronger among coloured voters), but there were forces, here referred to as "costs", which at that stage were inhibiting their commitment to vote.

The research identified the four major "costs" in the voting process as fear of violence and intimidation; confusion about parties, policies and the democratic process; cynicism about the fairness of the electoral process and the prospects for change; and a lack of voter education.

FEAR was the most salient aspect of the uncertain voters' reluctance to vote. Women often expressed these fears: "If I vote for somebody, you may find that a lot of people may die because of my vote" (African working class woman, Soweto) or "I would be fearful to vote -- I am afraid to die" (woman farm worker, Orange Free State). The rural African focus groups had strong fears about violence, intimidation, and revenge because of "wrong" voting. Urban African focus groups were simultaneously most excited and most fearful of elections. In eight of the eleven African urban focus groups there was substantial support for abstention, should conditions of violence and intimidation not improve.

The focus group participants expressed a widespread belief in the absence of a climate of free political activity. When they were asked to react to a fictitious radio announcement that "South Africa's first democratic election has just been agreed to", many (and overwhelmingly women) associated the announcement with images of violence and death ("killings", "murder"), mayhem, rampages, intimidation, victimisation, revenge and destruction of property. Women's reaction to the announcement included: "When we hear of an election, we think of death", "There will be war. And many people will die", "Intimidation is the first thing that comes to mind", "The violence will be on a large scale".

The participants were convinced that **intimidation** could make them change their votes. This African middle class man from Soweto said: "I would vote for a party to avoid being victimised, for the sake of our children ... what would YOU do?" Or, this working class woman from Soweto: "(Intimidation) can make me change my mind or stop me from voting to save my life". There was also a fear that election could bring intimidation TO PARTICIPATE, for instance: "There will be children toyi-toying in the street, looking for those who are not going to vote, and next thing a stone is thrown through your window" (African working class man, Durban).

Who would be responsible for intimidation? In the minds of the focus group participants virtually no-one escaped suspicion. The main suspects, in the words of the participants: the seniors in our village, Zulus, the IFP and homeland leaders, employers, white farmers, the (NP) government, the ANC, whites, those who live comfortably, etc. The most common source identified was the (then) Government, the state and ethnic actors. Inkatha was often spontaneously singled out.

There was a widespread fear among African voters about "talking politics to strangers", for instance in a taxi, or on the train, or while walking home or to the shops. This applied especially to African women and to men in the urban areas. These were some of the reactions to the focus group question: "Would you talk politics to strangers?": "We are scared to death of doing that", "I will be dead if I talk to the IFP", "We just pray for a safe journey when we travel with strangers", "If I differ from her, she might trace me after that with a whole mob of her friends and she can kill me", "He or she might belong to a wrong political organisation ... the one that kills people ... The one called Inkatha".

The focus group voters had mixed feelings about the **secrecy** of their votes. Whilst some feared that their ballots could be identified after the election (for instance by regional governments), many situated secrecy in the social context of voting. While the vote itself may be secret, the "society is politics" and "everybody knows" who you normally support. The mere act of casting a vote would mean that it would not be secret, they surmised.

CYNICISM about the value of the individual vote, the fairness of the electoral process, and the ability of a new government to change things, were indications of the second major potential obstacle to high electoral participation. These concerns were fairly widespread. Uncertain voters would need reassurances that each individual vote would count, that the elections process would not be corrupted, that a new government would be able to solve social problems and thereby make a difference, and that violence would decrease with the installation of a new government.

Urban African and coloured focus group participants were more likely to emphasise the importance of their individual votes than rural African or Indian participants. "You may find that the person who is wanted by the majority just needs one vote to win ... then maybe we can have peace" (African working class woman, Durban), or "My vote will carry back to the government, it will help to change things in South Africa", said a coloured working class woman from Paarl.

Cynicism prevailed around possible **fraud and corruption** in elections. Corruption, rigging the vote, and bribery were the major concerns. On the one hand, there were those who said that they would only vote if they could be guaranteed that the election would be free and fair. On the other hand, there was an acceptance of unfairness as an inevitability. Examples of fraud in Namibia, Angola and elsewhere in Africa permeated the focus group discussions on the "free and fairness" of the forthcoming South African elections. "Fraud and cheating is something that one will never be able to avoid", said an African working class man from Durban.

Cynicism about whether a new (interpreted as black) government would be a "responsible" government regularly emerged as a factor which could discourage participation. Uncertainty about whether a new government could make a difference was weighed up against possibly unsafe conditions at the polls: If a new government would not be more responsible or capable than the old NP government, why risk going to the polls? Women were somewhat more cynical about the ability of a new government to make a difference than the men in the focus groups. They feared nepotism, corruption and lack of caring by politicians. Among rural Africans the cynicism was often linked to experiences with the bantustan governments. Others spoke more generally: "New governments promise many things, and yet these promises do not happen" (female OFS farm worker), or "People have been suffering. So now ... they put into their pockets what they have lost over the years" (African middle class woman, Durban).

Participants were particularly cynical about a new government's ability to bring an end to violence, especially if some political groupings could possibly refuse to accept election results. There were doubts about the Zulus, the white right-wing, and "those who lose the election".

CONFUSION about parties and their policies emerged as the third potential obstacle to high participation. It was especially the African (both rural and urban) participants who said they would abstain, unless they become better informed about party policies and programmes. Whilst they identified violence as a major factor preventing party political access to the voters, they did not exonerate the parties from this responsibility. As this African middle class man from Soweto said: "I see no reason why people would not want to vote if they are well informed ... But they are not well informed." An Indian woman from Durban related voting and information to trust: "If they don't prove themselves, and give us something to vote for, I'll never vote."

The **LACK OF VOTER EDUCATION** featured fairly low-key among potential reasons for abstaining, at least at that stage of the process. The discussions indicated that whilst there was a major need for voter education, most of the participants did not identify this as a potential reason for not voting.

The "voting day" discussions sometimes centred around specific reconstructions of what the process around voting stations would be like: "There are boxes which say PAC or IFP or ANC. You can put your paper in any of these boxes. You will have ticked alongside the party you want and your name will be there" (African informal housing man, Soweto), or "It is only the guards who will know who you voted for" (African working class man, Durban). A mock ballot exercise in the focus groups created much advice and discussion, despite moderators urging participants to quietly "cast" their own votes.

THE BASELINE SURVEY RESULTS ON OBSTACLES

Why would significant numbers of voters not want to vote in an election with the historical significance of the first truly democratic election in South Africa?[15] The Matla Baseline Survey showed that there was no single, simple answer. But many of the answers centred around the "confusion factor". Because of not knowing enough about what was happening in politics and transition in South Africa, many voters felt left-behind. They lost, or never gained, interest in voting. A further element of confusion was directly related to the voting process. Many of the abstainers said they "Don't know enough about voting and elections". The analysis below shows the extent to which many doubted the secrecy of their ballots, did not have identity documents, and spoilt their ballots in mock voting.

The demographic groups in the South African voting population who felt most disempowered on the different dimensions of the "confusion factor" are identified below. The demographic disempowerment analysis in this section focuses on gender, age, education and level of urbanisation. These are analysed in relation to identity documents, ballot secrecy, and low access to the mass media. Mock ballots are analysed in terms of regional and level of urbanisation differences.

Reasons for not wanting to vote:
Foremost among the reasons given by the African voters who said that they would not vote, was the fact that they did not understand what was going on in politics in South Africa, then followed "personal reasons" (like age, religion), not knowing enough about elections and voting, and not understanding enough about political parties and their policies. In the fifth

place was the lack of identity documents. The lack of understanding of what was going on in politics in South Africa was consistently stated as a major reason in all of the regions. A total of 58% of the African voters in the Western Cape who indicated that they would not vote, gave the lack of identity documents as their reason. This compared with the 17% of the African voters in Natal (the second highest intended regional abstention) who mentioned lack of ID as the deterrent to voting. The fear of violence at this stage did not rate among the top reasons in any of the regions. All indications are that the climate in the country with regard to voting had started changing. (See Table 3, Appendix 3.)

The 19% of coloured voters who at that stage intended abstaining were mostly motivated by a lack of understanding of politics, followed by a lack of interest, or apathy, and not knowing enough about parties and policies. For PWV coloured voters a lack of trust in political parties and leaders was the most important reason. For Indian voters (23% of whom did not want to vote at that stage) "just not interested" was the most important reason, trailed by not understanding what was happening in politics in South Africa, and personal reasons. The Natal Indian voters overwhelmingly gave this lack of interest as their reason, but for PWV Indian voters it was the combination of not knowing enough about elections, too much fighting between political parties, and the feeling that individual votes would not make a difference. White voters who wanted to abstain were driven by personal reasons, a lack of trust in parties and politicians, and the feeling that their (white) votes would not make a difference amidst the large number of black voters.[16]

Despite smaller differences, we therefore see a large measure of convergence in reasons for not wanting to vote in all major race sectors of the South African voting population.

The identity document problem:

The Matla research showed that identity documents could be a major disenabling factor in the election, especially for African, but also for coloured voters. A total of 11% of African and 10% of coloured voters did not have any of the documents that would entitle them to vote. These (official) identity documents included "homeland" ID's, South African travelling documents, the old "passes", etc. 2% of coloured and 3% of African voters reported that they did not have any identity documents at all. Of those who lacked official identity documents, 9% of African and 7% of coloured voters did have birth or baptismal certificates. (Indian and white voters had no virtually identity document problems.) (See Diagram 2, Appendix 2.)

A regional comparison of African voters demonstrates the diversity of the identity document problem in the run-up to the election. The regions worst affected were the Northwest, the Eastern Cape and the Eastern Transvaal. Between 11% and 16% of these voters only had birth or baptismal certificates as their form of identification. Following these regions, 6% of African voters in the Western Cape and 4% in the Eastern Cape had no identity documents at all. (See Table 4, Appendix 3.)

"Demographic disempowerment" only manifested itself to some extent with regard to the possession of identity documents. Except for Natal and the Northern Transvaal, there were consistently more women than men who either only had birth or baptismal certificates, or had no identity documents at all. The gender gap was generally around 4%. Different dynamics operated with regard to age. In contrast with other facets of voter empowerment,

where the older voters were at a disadvantage, it was the young (17-24 years) who lacked identity documents. The extreme case was the Eastern Cape, where 48% fewer of the youngest than the oldest age category only had birth or baptismal or no identity documents. In the other regions these discrepancies varied from 24% in Natal to 38% in the Northwest. Level of **education** failed to distinguish clearly between those with and without appropriate identity documents. Generally it was the voters on the mid-levels of education (Standards 5-8) who were least likely to have appropriate ID's. The general trend, with a couple of minor exceptions, was that the more rural voters would have fewer valid **identity documents**. This trend was the strongest in the Eastern Cape, the Northwest and the PWV (the latter with a limited number of rural voters).

Uncertainty about ballot secrecy:
Whereas doubt about the secrecy of the ballot was not regularly volunteered as the most important reason for possible abstention, there were significant numbers of voters who either were not sure or believed it would be possible for others to find out who they had voted for. In conditions of violence or intimidation the absence of a belief in secrecy could deter people from voting.

The belief in ballot secrecy was the highest among African voters, followed, in this order, by white, Indian and coloured. 20% of coloured voters were not sure whether the ballot would be secret or not. (See Diagram 3, Appendix 2.) Regionally among African voters, doubt about secrecy was the highest in Natal and the Eastern Transvaal -- the two regions with the largest proportions of voters who indicated that they would not vote. In Natal 22% were not sure whether the ballot would be secret or not (a further 5% thought the ballot was definitely not secret) and in the Eastern Transvaal 14% were not sure (with 4% more believing the ballot would definitely not be secret). The highest belief in the secrecy of the ballot was found in the Northern Transvaal (89%) and the PWV and OFS (85%). Around 30% of coloured voters in all sampled regions had some doubts about ballot secrecy. (See Table 5, Appendix 3.)

Belief in ballot secrecy consistently across the regions went down with gender changing to female, increasing age, lower education, and moving out of the metropolitan and urban areas. **Gender** disempowerment was most pronounced in Natal. 81% of men and 66% of women believed in the secrecy of the ballot. In the Eastern Transvaal the gender gap was 89% versus 75%. Gender differences in other regions ranged from 2% in the PWV to between 4% and 9% in the rest. The **age** category of 50 years or older consistently emerged as disempowered in relation to the two other age categories used for analysis (17 to 24, and 25 to 49 years). Natal and the Eastern Transvaal again stood out -- in Natal approximately 20% fewer of this age group than the two other groups believed that their votes would be secret. In the Eastern Transvaal the gap was 11% and 15%, respectively. The Northwest and the Western Cape had similar trends. The impact of **education** on empowerment trends was small in the cases of the PWV, the Northwest, the Western Cape, and the OFS, and big in the remainder of the regions. Well over 20% of the lowest education group (Standard 4 or lower) in Natal did not believe in the secrecy of the ballot, with the discrepancy in the Northern Transvaal and the Eastern Cape also very high. 17% more of those in the mid-education category, and 13% more of the voters in the high education category (Standard 9 plus) believed in ballot secrecy. It was only in some of the regions that the **level of urbanisation** made a difference to empowerment -- it did especially in the Eastern Cape and Natal. In the Eastern Cape 20%

fewer of the rural than the urban and metropolitan voters believed in the secrecy of their ballots. In Natal the discrepancy was around 14%, and in the PWV 11%.

This demographic analysis pointed to likely lower voter turnout in a number of regions. Looking at the demographic distributions in the regions, it would be the regions with more of the lower educated, higher ages, less urbanisation, and more women where lower turnouts could be expected.

Low access to the mass media:
A demographic analysis of the level of access to the mass media shows significant differences among the major gender, age, education and urbanisation categories.[17] Given the gender, age, education and urbanisation gaps in empowerment to vote, more equal trends with regard to exposure to the mass media would improve chances of empowerment through access to voter education and political information. However, differential access and exposure, in line with the already existing gaps, would further reinforce disempowerment. The general finding from this part of the analysis was that discrepant exposure levels indeed tended to reinforce the prior demographic inequalities. The information analysed in this section is based on answers to the question: "Where do you get your information about what is happening in politics in the country?" (See Table 6, Appendix 3.)

It was only with regard to access to the radio that African **women** sometimes fared slightly better (and not statistically significant) than men. Across all regions, men were more (and often much more) exposed to political information on television and in newspapers. This correlates with men generally having higher levels of education than the women. The regions with the largest gender gaps were most of the "Northern belt" of South Africa -- the Northern Transvaal, the Eastern Transvaal and the Northwest -- plus the Eastern Cape. The **older** the voters, the more disadvantaged they were in terms of access to mass media sources of political information. Large age gaps existed between the 50+ age group and the other two age categories. In the majority of regions, the 24-49 year olds had the most access, both to television and to daily newspapers. The gap between the older and the mid-category often was well over 30%, and in the case of the Northwest and access to television, the gap between these two age groups was 54%. It was only in the Northern Transvaal that people with the lowest of the three levels of **education** had significantly less access to radio than the better educated. Radio would be the mass medium with by far the best reach among those in need of voter education. The voters with a Standard 9+ education had up to 50% in the Eastern Cape, 48% in the Northern Transvaal, and 46% in Natal, more access to television than those with a Standard 4 or lower education. Obviously (because of the close association between literacy and formal education), the gap with regard to newspaper access would be large between the lowest and highest educated. These gaps went up to 81% in the case of the OFS, and 73% for the Northern Transvaal and the Northwest. In most other regions this gap was around the 60% level. The trend with regard to **level of urbanisation** was commonly that radio was the best medium for the rural areas. The exposure gap opened up on access to television and was huge on newspaper usage.

Spoilt ballots:
The major indication of voting disempowerment, and need for ballot literacy voter education, was obtained through the mock ballot analysis. Because the ballots were completely

anonymous, only national trends, regional comparisons, and level of urbanisation analyses could be done.

There were high rates of spoilt ballots, ranging from 4% to 10% in the different regions. The rate was 10% nationally for African voters, and 9% for Indian voters.[18] The biggest single reason for spoilt ballots among African voters was illiteracy -- 4% of the respondents indicated to the interviewer that they could not read or write, and thus could not complete the ballot. It is possible than many illiterate voters nevertheless managed to cast their mock ballots. Another 4% of African voters made mistakes in voting, including more than one cross, the cross not in the right block, signed their names, or even wrote "I don't know how to vote". Similar percentages of coloured, Indian and white voters made these mistakes. (See Table 7, Appendix 3.)[19]

A regional comparison showed that the largest ballot spoilage problem occurred in the Northern belt: the Northern Transvaal, the Eastern Transvaal and the Northwest. In these three regions, as well as in Natal, rural voters were also much more disempowered than urban and (where applicable) metropolitan voters. In the Northwest, rural spoilage rates went up to 28% of mock ballots cast (and 14% spoilage in the urban areas of the Northwest). In the Eastern Transvaal the rural rate was 22% (compared with 15% urban) and in the Northern Transvaal 20% (compared with 2% urban spoilage). Natal and the Eastern Cape, two regions in which some other voter education problems have already been identified, had relatively low rates of spoilage (10% and 8% rural spoilage, respectively). (See Diagram 4, Appendix 2.)

The regional breakdowns also show that illiteracy in the rural areas was the major reason for spoilage in the high-spoilage-regions of the Northern and the Eastern Transvaal. The Northwest was the only region where "genuine spoilage" was particularly high.

In this section we have seen the potentially huge disempowering effect of confusion -- of not understanding what is going on in politics in the country, or of not knowing enough about voting and elections. Certain demographic groups, for instance women, or, generally, older, less educated, or more rural people, have even more intense experiences of disempowerment. Does the apparent success of the April 1994 South African election (see Section 5) mean that voters now are empowered to take a full and active participative role in representative democracy? The research and specific conditions in the April elections caution against such assumptions. First, the success of participation in the election depended on extensive assistance at the voting stations, as well as very flexible ballot acceptance rules. Second, voting is one of the "easiest" forms of political participation. There are clear definitions of what this form of participation requires, everybody is motivated, and the circumstances are very special. South Africans across the board are not yet equipped for ongoing participation in the processes of representative democracy. Many skills remain to be learnt for this democracy to closely reflect their expectations and needs. In addition, widespread and ongoing processes need to be adopted to empower ordinary South Africans with the political information which could prevent them from receding into the disempowerment of political confusion.

5. ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPATION OUTCOMES IN THE ELECTION

Two major aspects of the overall success story of the South African election were that the turnout was high, and that the rate of spoilt ballots was low. Also, the interaction between the two factors, and the peace and good will that reigned on the four voting days, cannot be underestimated. This short section assesses the voter education dimensions of the election outcome.

In a modest way, this research project facilitated Matla Trust activities in campaigning for conditions which would provide maximum assistance to inexperienced voters at the polls. It also assisted in the choice of the most appropriate mass media for disseminating voter education information, and in targeting voter education materials at the demographic groups who most needed voter education. In pointing to the devastating effect that violence could have on the election, the project also emphasised the need for dissemination of information on the rights and protection of voters going to the polls. In many cases it was the inputs of the major voter education agencies that secured these user-friendly processes. Assistance inside voting stations, by Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and party political officials, was also lobbied for by voter educators. Politics-free zones around voting stations further helped ensure peace of mind.

Voter education programmes had a significant input into addressing the voter education needs. The challenges of voter empowerment were taken up by organisations specifically created to conduct voter education, trade unions, non-governmental organisations, civic and community organisations, foreign government institutions, the South African government and various state department and parastatals, business organisations, political parties, churches, universities, and others. Voter education activities took a variety of forms, ranging from extended and systematic mass media campaigns, to community and workplace based mock elections and plays. In addition, informal, person-to-person voter education is not quantifiable, but was hugely important.

It remains difficult to estimate how many voters were reached by voter education. It is even more problematic to assess the success of voter education. One indication was provided by a CASE tracking study for IFEE (CASE/IFEE, 1994). Estimates were, for instance, that around 11,2 million adult Africans saw some specific voter education television advertisement. A total of 8,8 million people (not diversified by voter status) saw some of the series of IFEE television advertisements. Similarly, it was estimated that 9,8 million people heard IFEE radio advertisements. In studying newspaper penetration, it was estimated that 79% of African newspaper readers and 81% of coloured newspaper readers were reached by voter education (the percentages of African and coloured voters reached would be substantially lower).[20]

Ballot spoilage:
The level of spoilage of the ballots in the April election was extremely low. Of the more than 20 million votes cast, only 1% was spoilt. A comparison of the Baseline Survey (with a margin of error of 3% nationally) and the election outcome, point to a dramatic change in levels of ballot literacy. This constitutes strong circumstantial evidence that voter education and empowerment had been largely successful.

The total number of votes that was rejected (spoilt ballots), nationally in South Africa, was 193 081. This amounted to 0,98% or 1%, of the total number of votes cast (IEC statement, 5 June 1994). The spoilt ballot rates did not vary much between the provinces: 0,6% for the Eastern Cape; 0,7% PWV; 0,9% Northern Transvaal; 1,1% Orange Free State and Northern Cape; 1,2% Western Cape, Natal and Northwest; 1,3% Eastern Transvaal.

Level of participation:
An exact calculation of the level of participation in the 25-29 April 1994 election is impossible. South Africa neither had a voters roll nor even fairly precise information about the number of voters. The estimates of the number of voters generally ranged from 22,5 to 24 million. At least 20 million of these voters had voted for the first time in legitimate national elections.

All indications, albeit subjective, are that the level of voter participation in the election was over 80%. Based on a voting population of 22,7 million, the percentage poll was 86,9%. If the voting population is set at 24 million, the percentages poll changes to 82,2%.

Based on the low estimate of a national electorate of 22,7 million, the regional percentage polls range from the highest of 93% for the Northern Cape to the lowest of 83% for Natal. The percentage poll for the different regions, based on a 22,7 million electorate, was (with Baseline Survey findings, based in some cases on somewhat different but mostly comparable regional boundaries, in brackets): 83% Natal (74%); 85% Eastern Transvaal (74%), 85% Orange Free State (84%) and 85% Northern Transvaal (84%); 87% PWV (83%); 89% Western Cape (95%); 90% Eastern Cape (93%); 91% Northwest (89%); and 93% Northern Cape. Should it be assumed that the actual size of the electorate was 24 million, and that the proportions of voters per region remain the same, the percentage polls for each of the regions would be 78% Natal; 81% Eastern Transvaal, Orange Free State and Northern Transvaal; 83% PWV; 85% Western Cape; 86% Eastern Cape and Northwest; and 89% Northern Cape. The percentage poll range on this upper estimate of the electorate therefore is 78% (Natal) to 89% (Northern Cape). Whatever therefore the estimates of the size of the electorate, the average national turnout was over 80%, and well over 80% for most of the individual provinces. The national average poll was significantly reduced by the low poll in Natal, which constitutes approximately 20% of South Africa's total population.

6. THE IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRACY

This case study focused on dimensions of empowerment of the South African electorate. It explored the level of voting skill empowerment that was indicated before the historic April 1994 election, and pointed out how different regions and demographic groups appeared systematically disempowered. It also investigated extent of empowerment through motivation to vote. The fairly extensive analysis of both motivation for abstention and for voting shed light on areas to bear in mind in future work to consolidate democracy in South Africa.

Furthermore, the analysis of reasons for voting present us with useful information on what democracy and the act of voting meant to the new South African electorate. The Matla Trust Focus Groups and Baseline Survey provided a sound assessment of the meaning which South

African voters attached to their votes -- of what they hoped to achieve by casting their votes in the election. The attainment of freedom, equal rights, and democracy had an acute importance to them. The meaning of these concepts did not end with the casting of a ballot and the installation of a new government. Many voters directly articulated vast social needs, like housing, education for themselves and their children, better living conditions in general, or jobs. Their wish for liberation had specific content. The Matla Baseline Survey provided us with concrete information on the diversity and the distribution of these needs. The study also informs us, in much detail, on what the needs of different demographic groups, within regions and race, are. In addition, it familiarises us with important details of the expectations directed at the new South African government. In these respects, the Matla research has direct relevance for our understanding of the social dynamics which are bound to shape the post-election milieu.

South Africa's transition thus far, with the aid of voter education programmes and research, has set the base for the ongoing development of democracy. Through the empowerment of voters and the generally high levels of turnout, South Africa has taken the first steps towards democracy. The first test for the procedures of democracy, the 1994 election, was largely passed. Voters have gained a large measure of confidence in their own ability to cast votes and to be part of this democratic process. Voter education initiatives took notable steps to address various demographic disparities. Yet, the entrenchment and continued acceptance of the "rules of democracy" still have to be proven. Similarly, voting is only one small form of political participation. For democracy to become entrenched and to have a daily meaning for ordinary people, democracy education for other forms of political participation is also required. Voting is the easiest form of political participation. Further skills training and ongoing information to counter political confusion are called for.

The high turnout in the South African election should be seen as the starting point for a process of deepening of democracy in South Africa. Potentially far-reaching empowerment took place through the act of voting. It is important that this existing empowerment be further harnessed into an ability of continuous involvement. Democracy in South Africa can only become consolidated if the vote becomes a precursor to having access to information as well as the skills for ongoing presentation of demands.

Through their participation in this research project, either as focus group participants or as respondents in the baseline survey, thousands of South Africans helped to set the course for a democratic government and the substantive development of democracy in South Africa. The broader project for the entrenchment of democracy in South Africa has to continue.

NOTES

1. My thanks to Matla Trust for the permission to share this information with a broader community. Whilst I played a big part in the whole research project, a large team of people contributed. My special thanks to a number of people who, in the process of this research, broadened my insights: Jos Kuper, Kim Kruger and Carrol Moore. The current author did the research upon which much of this paper is based as a part of Research Initiatives. Research Initiatives was commissioned by Matla Trust for the three phase voter education research project. The second partner in Research Initiatives was C. Charney. He was part of the research team referred to above, and focused on the voter education analyses of the phase 2, an overview survey. This was an interim, preparatory stage of the research process, and is not incorporated into this paper. The framework for analysis and interpretation in the current paper remains the sole responsibility of the current author.

2. The major "voting skills" addressed in the research project are "ballot literacy" (the knowledge and skills of how to complete and cast a valid ballot), the possession of identity documents, and knowledge about the secrecy of the ballot. The major motivation issues addressed are vote intention, and the reasons for wanting to vote, or intending to abstain..

3. Empowerment in this paper is used to refer to programmes, processes and strategies designed to facilitate participation and possession of skills on an equal basis to all demographic groups, including along the dimensions of gender, age, education and level of urbanisation. In addition, empowerment entails being equipped with the information and knowledge that make people feel they know what they are participating in, and why they are doing it.

4. A later follow-up evaluation study was done by CASE for the Matla Trust, using a much smaller sample, with a view to providing a further national overview of progress with voter education efforts (see CASE/IFEE, 1994).

5. "Uncommitted" in this paper refers to those voters who in recruitment for the focus groups said that they do not know for certain which political party they would vote for. There was also a control question in the recruitment questionnaire. This question was used to "sift out" potential participants who, despite their answers to the first question, had strong party political views. "Uncertain turnouts" simply mean those voters who may end up not voting.

6. Phase 2 of this research project, an overview survey of limited size and objectives, is not analysed in this paper. This phase served as preparation for the Baseline Survey, which is extensively analysed in this paper.

7. The subsequent changes to the boundaries of the regions/provinces mainly entailed adjustments to the Northwest and the Western Cape. The Northern Cape region, with

a very small voting population, was created out of these two regions. The boundary adjustments for other regions were either minor or none.

8. Focus groups is a suitable research methodology in cases where one wishes to explore motivations, feelings and values which underlie, for instance, voting behaviour. It facilitates deeper insights into people's thinking. Homogeneity in the composition of the groups is essential in order to get spontaneity in the discussions.

9. One of the first, truly national samples was used also in 1993 in a poll conducted by the Department of Constitutional Development in a survey of constitutional issues. Subsequently, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) also started using appropriate national samples. Many of the well-known public surveys, for instance those conducted by Markinor or MMR for the Argus company in the past used either very small rural African samples, or only African metropolitan samples. These particular Markinor surveys were done for commercial concerns. They therefore concentrated on areas where the "buying power" would be. It is not known to what extent private party political polling, or other government department polling projects, employed truly national samples.

10. This section presents a brief overview of the major issues that emerged from the research. It cannot hope to do justice to the complex and diversified findings of the total research project. The ownership of research rests with Matla and the final report, incorporating summaries of the first two phases of the project, are available from Matla Trust.

11. See the series of surveys conducted by the Institute for Multi-Party Democracy and the Human Sciences Research Council, 1994.

12. Standard 4 was taken as the cut-off point for the lowest category of education, because "standard 4 or higher" indicates the likely level of being literate.

13. As noted in the section of research methodology, tables and diagrams summarising the details of the demographic trends are not included in the current paper, purely because of constraints of space. The reading of arguments in the text does not depend on additional information in table form. Additional tabular information can be checked with the author.

14. This phase of the research did not explore all dimensions of the possible reasons for these regional differences. It only deals with reasons related to empowerment and voting. Possible additional reasons could lie in the particular political culture, and political and socio-economic experiences in the regions. These could be useful themes for further research.

15. The proportion of voters who intended to abstain was referred to in Section 3. This section deals with their motivations.

16. Detailed regional demographic analyses of the African voters' reasons for not wanting to vote were not performed, because the number of cases became too small for statistically valid analyses.

17. No separate analysis is being done of the ordinary patterns of exposure to the mass media, because such analyses yield commonsensical data. Those trends which are interesting with regard to the African voters are included in this current section of the analysis.

18. The Indian spoilage was largely attributable to these voters either making more than one cross, or writing on the mock ballot that they had not yet made up their minds (or something similar). In the context of access to media, etc. the Indian voters were not considered as seriously in need of voter education.

19. The eventual election criteria for ballot validity were very flexibly defined. Some ballots which therefore were counted as "spoilt" in this research project would have been accepted in the election's ballot counting. It was largely in response to voter education research that the flexible criteria were set.

20. The sample in this study was fairly small (1600 African and 400 coloured), and the regional and rural bases sometimes not very representative.

REFERENCES

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Supplementary sources:

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APPENDIX 1: THEMES OF DISCUSSION GUIDE AND QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

THEMES IN THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Mood:

How participants feel about things happening in South Africa, also prompted to talk about the economy.

The election:

* Fictitious radio announcement, followed by a question on what the election means to them.
* Do they think they would vote in this election? Why? Or, why not?
* Do they think that voting in an election can help to change things in South Africa? In their lives? How?
* Mock ballot exercise. Pretend that this is voting day ...
* Do you believe that your vote will be secret? It this was a real election, would you worry about somebody finding out who you voted for?
* Do you believe there will be intimidation? Will this stop people voting or make them change their votes?
* Do you ever talk politics to strangers? Probe.

THEMES OF QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

Demographics:

Details were supplied on gender, age, race, nature of housing, level of urbanisation, home language, level of education, employment, religion, number of people in household, number of wage earners, and income.

Specific voter education items:

* Respondents were asked whether they had any of a specified range of identity documents.
* Regarding ballot secrecy, the question was asked whether the person thought anyone else could find out who they had voted for (even if the person did not tell them).
* The respondents were asked to complete a mock ballot form. These were completed anonymously, and "cast" into a mock ballot box.

Motivation to vote:

* The respondents were asked whether they personally would vote (or not) if the election took place "tomorrow".
* Thereafter they were asked, depending on their answer to the first question, to identify the most important reason why they want to vote, or do not want to vote.

Access to the mass media:

* The voters were asked where they get their information about what is happening in politics in the country. They were also probed about other possible ways in which they also get information.
* They were also asked how often they watch television, listen to the radio or read newspapers.
* There were also probed on which particular media were being used.
* Media credibility was assessed by asking the respondents which of each of the three media typed they trust and believe.

Diagram 1:

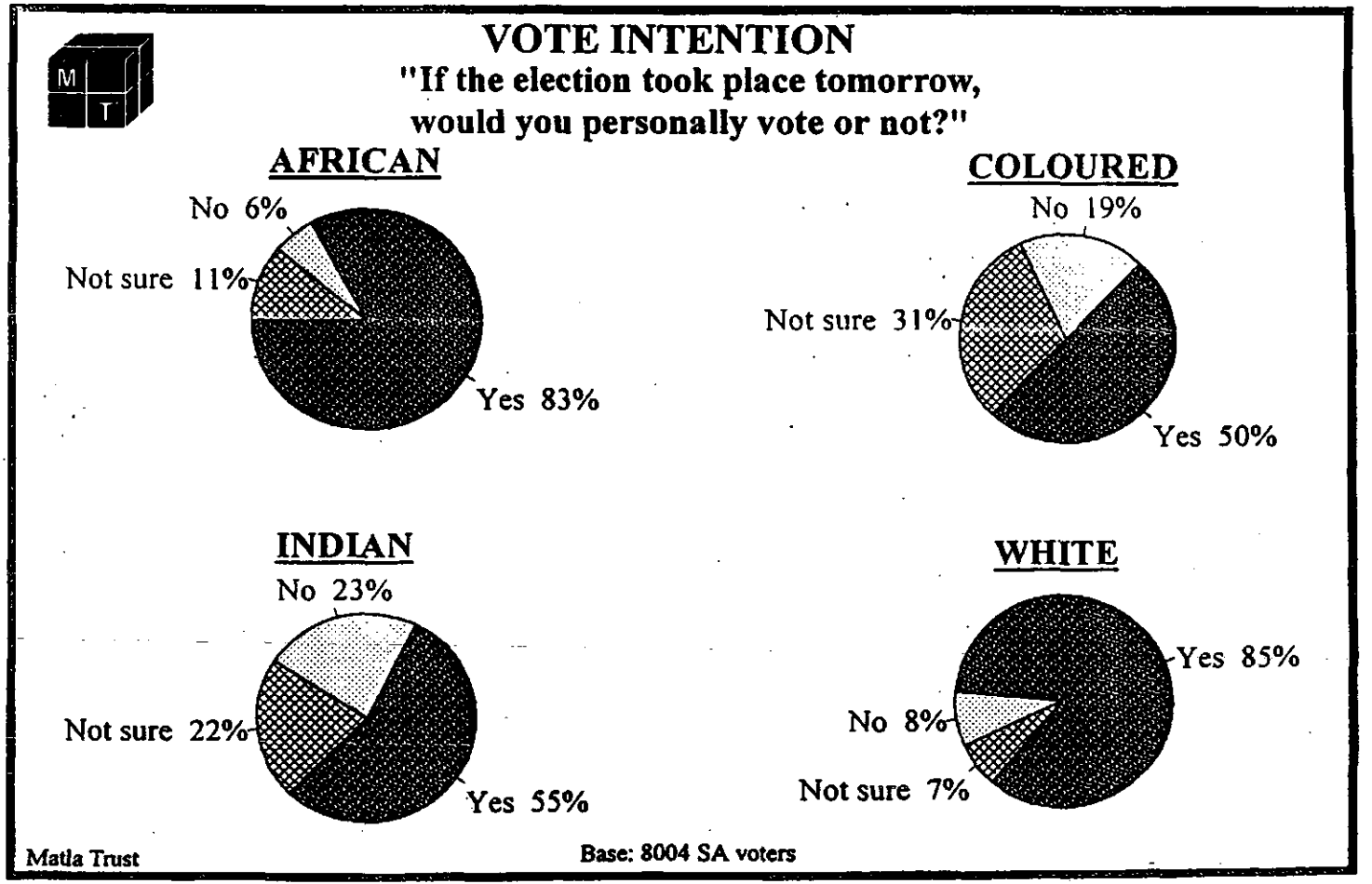
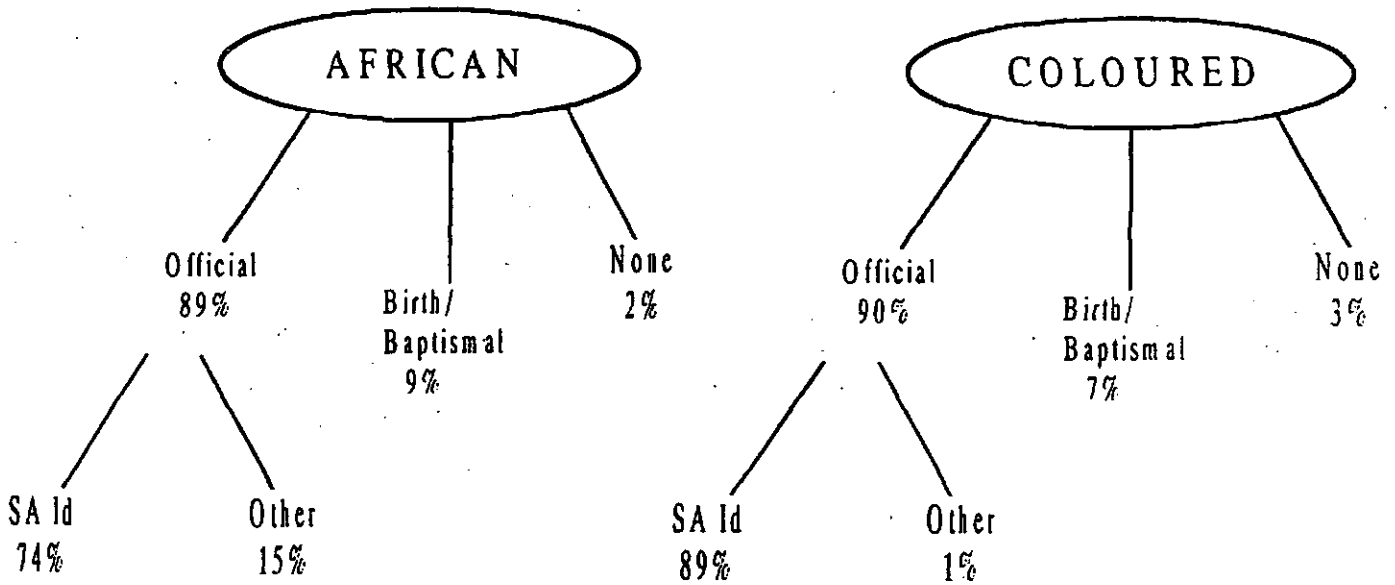

VOTE INTENTION
"If the election took place tomorrow, would you personally vote or not?"
AFRICAN
No 6%
Not sure 11%
Yes 83%
COLOURED
No 19%
Not sure 31%
Yes 50%
INDIAN
No 23%
Not sure 22%
Yes 55%
WHITE
Yes 85%
No 8%
Not sure 7%
Matla Trust
Base: 8004 SA voters

Diagram 2:

POSSESSION OF IDENTITY DOCUMENTS

AFRICAN AND COLOURED VOTERS *



Matla Trust * 0,3% Indian 0% white voters have no ID BASE: 4652 African and 1600 coloured voters

Diagram 3:

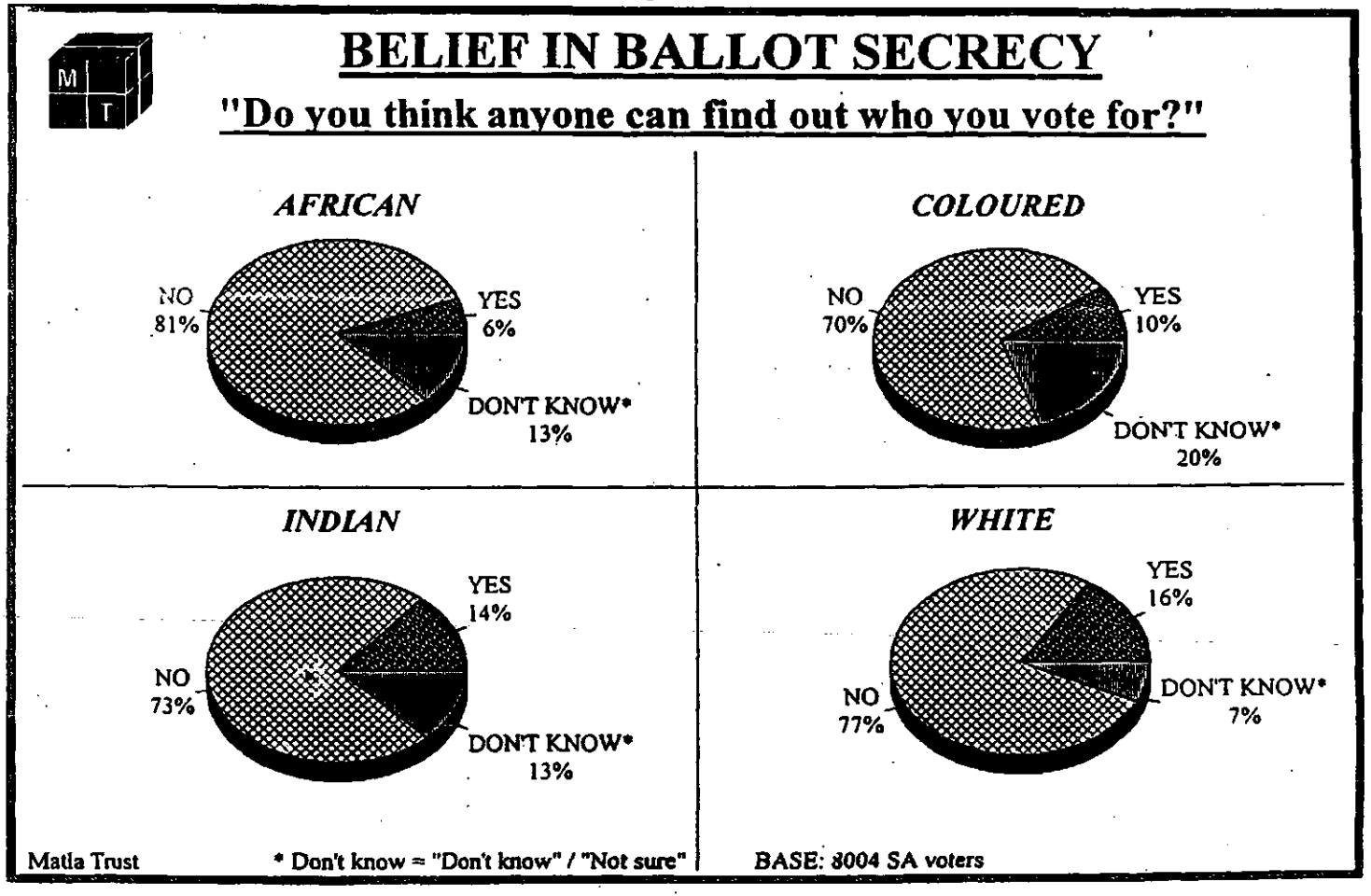

BELIEF IN BALLOT SECRECY
"Do you think anyone can find out who you vote for?"
AFRICAN
NO 81%
YES 6%
DON'T KNOW* 13%
COLOURED
NO 70%
YES 10%
DON'T KNOW* 20%
INDIAN
NO 73%
YES 14%
DON'T KNOW* 13%
WHITE
NO 77%
YES 16%
DON'T KNOW* 7%
Matla Trust
* Don't know = "Don't know" / "Not sure"
BASE: 8004 SA voters

Diagram 4:

REGIONAL COMPARISON OF SPOILT BALLOT RATES BREAKDOWN BY METRO - URBAN - RURAL

AFRICAN VOTERS

M = METRO
U = URBAN
R = RURAL

Percentages of spoilt ballots
(Average African rate = 10%)

PWV	N. TVL		E. TVL		N. WEST	
M	U	R	U	R	U	R
9	2	20	15	22	14	28

W. CAPE		NATAL			E. CAPE			O.F.S		
M	U	M	U	R	M	U	R	M	U	R
4	4	3	5	10	5	7	8	9	4	8

Matla Trust

Table 1:

VOTE INTENTION

REGIONAL COMPARISON

AFRICAN VOTERS

	PWV n=952	N. TVL n=581	N. WEST n=375	E. TVL n=382	W. CAPE n=382	E. CAPE n=752	OFS n=379	NATAL n=849
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Would vote	83	84	89	74	95	93	84	74
Would not vote	7	7	4	12	1	3	10	6
Not sure if would vote	10	9	7	14	4	4	6	20

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BASE: 4652 African voters

Table 2:

REASONS TO VOTE (TOP FIVE)

"What is the most important reason why you want to vote?"

% intending to vote / Main reasons	AFRICAN 83%	%	COLOURED 50%	%	INDIAN 55%	%	WHITE 85%	%
Freedom, equal rights, democracy	1	23	2	13	3	14		
More jobs	2	11					-	
Better life, living conditions	3	10	4	10				
Government of choice	4	9					2	13
End apartheid, discrimination	5	8						
Better life family			1	21	2	15	3	11
Peace			3	11	1	19	5	7
Citizen duty			5	8			1	25
Better caring government					4	12		
Order, stability					5	10		
Prevent black government							4	8

Base: 8004 SA voters

Matla Trust

Table 3:

REASONS FOR NOT VOTING (TOP FIVE)

"What is the most important reason why you do not want to vote?"

% intending not to vote / Main reasons	AFRICAN 6%	%	COLOURED 19%	%	INDIAN 23%	%	WHITE 8%	%
Do not understand politics	1	24	1	25	2	12	5	8
Personal	2	15	5	9	3	12	1	19
Don't know about elections / voting	3	12						
Don't know about parties / policies	4	8	3	12	4	9		
No ID	5	8						
Just not interested			2	20	1	26		
Don't trust parties / leaders			4	10			2	13
Too much fighting political parties					5	8	4	12
Vote makes no difference							3	13

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Base: 8004 SA voters

Table 4:

POSSESSION OF IDENTITY DOCUMENTS

REGIONAL COMPARISON

AFRICAN VOTERS

	PWV n=952	N. TVL n=581	N. WEST n=375	E. TVL n=382	W. CAPE n=382	E. CAPE n=752	OFS n=379	NATAL n=849
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Official SA Id	85	72	51	80	76	44	83	82
Other official, incl. homeland	8	16	31	7	11	38	8	9
Birth / baptismal	6	10	16	11	7	14	9	6
None	1	2	2	2	6	4	0.1	3

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BASE: 4652 African voters

Table 5: BELIEF IN BALLOT SECRECY

REGIONAL COMPARISON

AFRICAN VOTERS

	PWV n=952	N. TVL n=581	N. WEST n=375	E. TVL n=382	W. CAPE n=382	E. CAPE n=752	OFS n=379	NATAL n=849
Ballot is:	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Secret	85	89	83	82	79	78	85	73
Not secret	8	3	8	4	14	5	7	5
Don't know	7	8	9	14	7	17	8	22

Matla Trust

BASE: 4652 African voters

Table 6: AFRICAN: MEDIA USE

REGIONAL COMPARISON

	ALL n=4562	PWV n=952	N. TVL n=581	NORTH WEST n=375	E. TVL n=382	W. CAPE n=382	E. CAPE n=752	OFS n=379	NATAL n=849
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Radio	89	83	92	87	86	89	90	95	96
TV	71	82	69	80	57	85	57	69	66
Daily newspapers	43	64	53	48	38	36	31	40	24
Weekly newspapers	26	22	12	23	7	18	14	17	54

BASE: 4562

Table 7: REASONS FOR SPOILT

		AFRICAN		COLOURED		INDIAN		WHITE	
			%		%		%		%
Abstention	Refuse Won't vote Blank ballot		8		33		15		5
Tick, not X			4		1		3		1
Genuine spoilt	Not in block		1		2		1		1
	More than 1 X		1		1		2		1
	Sign name		1		0.1		*		0.1
	Crossed out	4	0.3	3	*	4	1	3	1
	Over lines		*		*		0.1		*
	Write party name		0.1		0.1		*		*
	"DK how to vote"		1		*		0.1		*
Illiterate	Cannot read		4		0.1		0.3		*
	Cannot write		0.3		*		0.1		*
Other	Other party		*		*		0.3		1
	Unsure: party		2		1		4		1
TOTAL SPOILT			**10**		**4**		**9**		**5**

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