



# Youth and political participation in South Africa's democracy

Surveying the voices of the youth through a multi-province focus group study

by Susan Booysen





# **Youth and political participation in South Africa's democracy:**

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## **Freedom House**

### *Johannesburg*

B2 House

8 Tyrwhitt Avenue, Rosebank

2196

### *Washington, DC*

1850 M Street NW

Floor 11

20036

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## ACRONYMS

<b>ABET</b>	Adult basic education and training
<b>ANC</b>	African National Congress
<b>BEE</b>	Black Economic Empowerment
<b>Cosatu</b>	Congress of South African Trade Unions
<b>DA</b>	Democratic Alliance
<b>EC</b>	Eastern Cape
<b>EFF</b>	Economic Freedom Fighters
<b>EPWP</b>	Expanded Public Works Programme
<b>FS</b>	Free State
<b>GP</b>	Gauteng
<b>HIV</b>	human immunodeficiency virus
<b>IEC</b>	Electoral Commission of South Africa
<b>KZN</b>	KwaZulu-Natal
<b>Lim</b>	Limpopo
<b>MPs</b>	members of Parliament
<b>Mp</b>	Mpumalanga
<b>MPLs</b>	members of Provincial Legislatures
<b>NC</b>	Northern Cape
<b>NEC</b>	National Executive Committee (of the ANC)
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-governmental organisations
<b>Numsa</b>	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
<b>NW</b>	North West
<b>SABC</b>	South African Broadcasting Corporation
<b>SAPS</b>	South African Police Service
<b>SARS</b>	South African Revenue Service
<b>SONA</b>	State of the Nation Address
<b>WC</b>	Western Cape

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This study of political engagement by young South Africans paints a picture of a youth who are politically interested and astute. They have moved beyond the adulation of a ‘miracle’ South Africa that followed liberalisation and the early democratic elections. They have been experiencing many of the fruits of democracy, yet they are frequently caught in a trap of poor qualifications and unemployment. They feel indebted to those who liberated them and the country, and look to government to make things right in their present-day lives. This ‘now generation’ aspires to the fast and glamorous life, yet battles with their party patrons for attention and an assured place in the queue for jobs. They fail to connect the dreams of liberation to the prevailing modes of distanced and often ineffectual representation. Hence, they welcome all initiatives to get the qualities of ‘two-directional’ and ‘responsive’ into their experiences of South African democracy and representation.

This is a synopsis of the key findings of Freedom House’s study of youth in South Africa, conducted through 12 moderated focus groups convened between November 2014 and January 2015. The youth voting age category of 18-35 is defined as youth. The study included 18-35 years olds from all racial and educational groups, and from both rural and urban-metropolitan areas in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, North West, and the Western Cape provinces. The study notes occasional differences between the 18-24 year olds (a second post-liberation youth cohort) and the older youth (the first post-liberation youth cohort).

The main findings are:

### **Life of adversity, overwhelmingly in a job-and-qualification trap**

The young people in this study feel they have missed the crest of the post-liberation opportunity windfall. Instead, they live in the dual shadow of educational qualifications with uncertain ‘currency’ and rampant unemployment. This is the story of the ‘have’ and ‘have not’ youth of South Africa, the difference between those who have qualifications, opportunities, and jobs and those who have not. This is the ‘now generation’ and their lives are defined by finding jobs, looking for opportunities, and proving to political principals that they have the political loyalty to fit any employment bill.

### **Self-deprecating and confused**

The youth of South Africa are both ambitious and self-deprecating, acknowledging that they see themselves as lazy and wanting government to make things happen for them. They often talk about getting involved in negative things. They need things to happen for them now, they require ‘speed cash,’ and often fall into ‘the wrong things.’ Some are merely in survival mode; others are in pursuit of the fast and well-heeled life. They veer between wanting the government to really ‘intervene’ in the economy to get jobs going and a ‘we are lazy’ idiom. Even those who have been dealt a better hand, and who are establishing themselves as the new middle classes, remain acutely aware of their counterparts’ lives of adversity. These young people are aware that they are the famed born frees, part of the first post-apartheid generation. Yet they have the sense that they have missed the boat, saying the youth cohort before them has scooped up the opportunities. Those are the ones who are entrenched in the available jobs, they believe. They observe that even the politicians are getting old – and no-one has plans to vacate their positions in favour of the waiting cohort.

### **Politically interested and cynical of the political system**

In contrast with perceptions that South Africa’s youth is apathetic, this study shows a generation (and cohorts within the youth generation) that is politically interested and who are regularly aware of the big and controversial issues of the day. They are astute in their assessments of the political order. They may not always be interested to register to vote and vote, but their abstention is well-argued. It is driven by cynicism about non-responsive, distant, and lazy public representatives. Hence, they may come across as disinterested (because they are often inactive) yet they are highly interested but cynical in political and public matters. The elected representatives are seen as interested in their own lives first and foremost. The people come a distant second. These young people, both vote-active and vote-inactive, are sceptical of any political leader who expects voters to endorse them so that the leaders can go on to enrich themselves while forgetting about the citizens who had sent them into high positions. Yet, they do their best to get these leaders’ attention and favour – through political engagement and voting.

### **Politically informed**

Contrary to many perceptions that the youth of South Africa crave more political information, this study shows that they believe they had all the information they needed to participate in election 2014. They appreciate the Electoral Commission's educational work. The political parties' often-propagandistic information campaigns were tolerated then and are derided now. These young people loathed the superficial appeals for votes, without matching evidence of commitment by those who wanted to be elected. They proclaim that they had all of the information they needed and knew where to get more had they required it. Rather, they were demotivated by the demeanour (including corruption) and lack of sincere representation by the incumbents and candidates.

### **Voting or not voting?**

The study shows young people torn between voting and not voting – quite a number participated in 2014, others did not. A handful was simply not interested. Others were deterred by the corruption they see in the system – both in terms of the dented ethos of serving the people and self-enrichment of the leadership. Many voted despite acute awareness of corruption and insufficient accountability. They have not given up hope for change. They suspend disbelief and cling to the hope that the system will still work for them. 'We vote for hope' and 'vote for change,' many of them proclaim. Others vote because of indebtedness to those who have fought for liberation, even if the adulation of South African democracy has been long lost. This is a post-liberation generation of youth: they have not forgotten but feel there is far too little to celebrate. The study also found an 'interrupted link' between political interest and political participation: even if these young people are interested in politics, they often choose not to vote; or they might vote, despite not being interested in politics. The latter is illustrated by transactional voting: vote to improve chances of getting a job; an action far removed from standard political interest.

### **Voting as a specific transaction for jobs**

'Voting for jobs' was an irrepressible refrain across the many of the groups, recurrent in many sections of the discussions. These young people see the government as the large dispenser of jobs. The youth take out insurance in the form of voting: they know they need to please the political principals who want to be re-elected into power. The transaction entails that there will be voters' roll evidence that they are registered voters, a stamp in their ID books to confirm that they had voted, and, beyond that, nothing to suggest they had been disloyal to the dominant party, the party whose principals need to be impressed. In exchange, the young people will be in good standing and will be known and 'seen' when the opportunity for employment, even in minor jobs, or for tenders arises.

### **Participation beyond elections**

These young South Africans participate widely in political and socio-political affairs, providing more evidence of political interest and engagement. Their activities range from volunteer community work (clean-ups and road-fixing, for example), to protest action to get jobs allocated to members of the local community. They are avid followers of political events. They obtain information from both traditional sources (radio and television, for example) and the new or social media. They often follow political leaders on Twitter and Facebook, albeit with high value being attached to entertainment value.



# 1 | Introduction – objectives, methodology, and analysis

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This project and report establish some groundwork for a Freedom House project to strengthen participation of young people in South Africa's. Their participation in electoral and democratic processes is an issue that is of great importance to future political trends in the country. Yet, their exact perspectives on politics generally and the electoral processes in particular is often poorly understood.

By 2014-15 youth constituted a substantial component of the South African citizenry and electorate (Tables 1 and 2). Simultaneously, youth registration and voting rates in South Africa's election 2014 was lower than figures for other age categories. The research will assess youth attitudes towards democracy and its core ingredients of voting, accountability, and political parties' actions to tap into the youth's political orientations.

The Freedom House research project comprises two stages. In the first stage the study explored the political parties' perspectives on communication and channels of accountability. The second stage dwells on the views and experiences of the youth of South Africa. The first stage was dealt with through a selection of interviews with the political parties at national and provincial levels in South Africa. The research findings of the second stage are the subject matter of the current report. The second stage uses focus group discussions with a broad demographic selection of young people of South Africa.

## 1.1 Objectives of the study

This Freedom House study aims at gaining definitive insights into the youth and their engagement with politics in South Africa, and to use this knowledge to assist in constructing a web platform, including a website and mobile applications (apps), that will assist the youth to further politically engage. The study surveys the experiences and needs of young citizens – aged 18-35 – with a view to establishing their orientations and thinking about South Africa's system of democracy, voting and representation, especially as these phenomena shape up in the aftermath of South Africa's 2014 elections. The focus is on obtaining citizen-side inputs into developing the experimental 'interactive representational mechanism', or democracy app, as a responsive mode of interaction between citizens, their communities and their representatives.

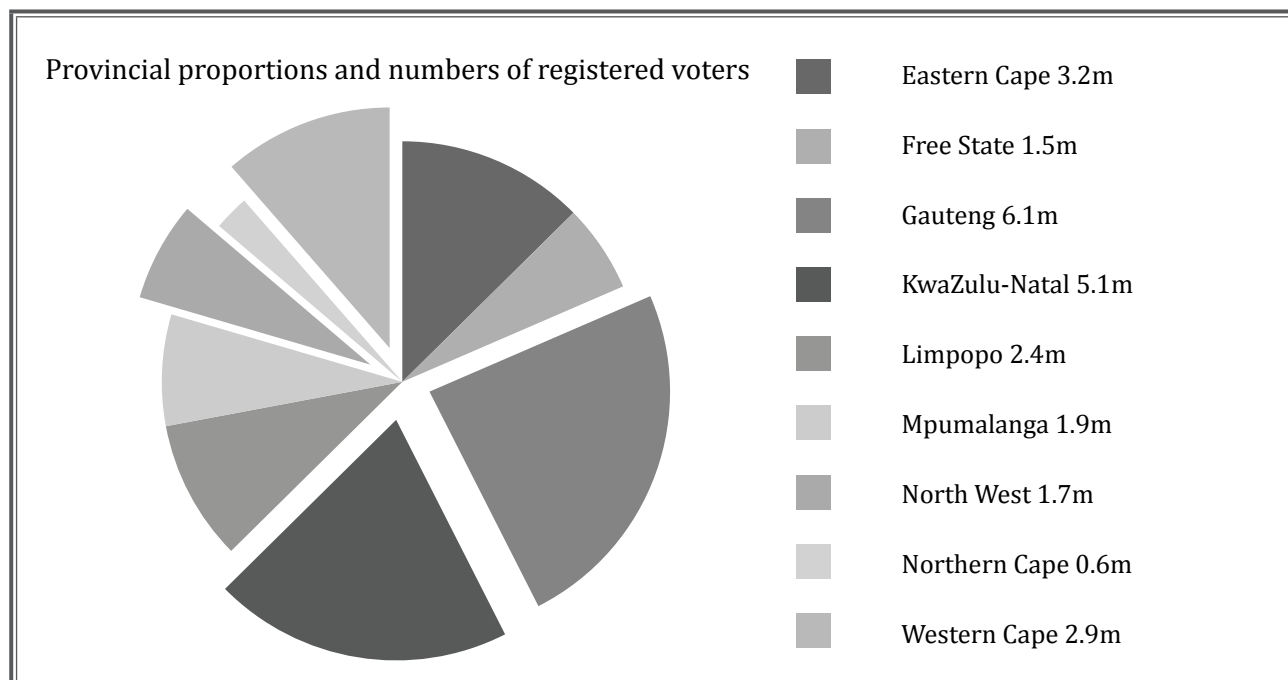
Multiple surveys of aspects of youth interest in politics and participation in available processes have been done.<sup>1</sup> The derived knowledge, however, provides snapshots that illuminate, for example, youth voter registration, youth inclination to vote or voter perceptions of policies and youth opportunities. The studies offer valuable snapshots into whether the South African youth are indeed apathetic, or on why precisely they are often not overly enthusiastic about casting ballots. Little is known, however, about how the insights link to help define in a generalised sense the political identity of youth in South Africa 20 years plus into democracy. This means, for example: Are the youth politically conscious but cynical, or interested in politics without the compulsion to be involved? Do young people feel enamoured with the political fruits of democracy, despite often being poor and un- or underemployed? Is South Africa 20 years into democracy a dream come true, or has South Africa of today lost its charm amongst the youth? What are young people's particular disappointments and frustrations?

This four-province and in-depth Freedom House study thus strives to offer a holistic picture of youth politically in South Africa circa 2015. The geographical focus is on the provinces of Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, North West, and Western Cape. Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal are South Africa's two most populous provinces and had the highest proportion of voters in election 2014 (Figure 1). The Western Cape is of interest not simply because it is the only one of South Africa's nine provinces that is not under ANC control, but also a province where two racial minority groups – coloured and white South Africans – are present in high proportions of the overall voting population. All three of these provinces also have high proportions of metropolitan populations. South Africa's metropolitan areas often suffer high level of service delivery deficits given growing and unsettled populations, largely due to in-migration from other parts of South Africa. This study, however, wanted to ensure that it also gets insights from more marginal provinces. North West was selected because it is an area that is well-known for governance and service delivery problems, with large rural areas and holds few opportunities for its young citizens. The conditions of the youth in rural areas of North West are comparable to those in KwaZulu-Natal's rural areas.

Gauteng was the province with the highest number of votes cast in the elections of 7 May 2014 – 4.4 million (turnout rate 73 percent). It was followed by KwaZulu-Natal with 3.9 million valid votes (76 percent turnout). As Figure 1 shows, Gauteng had 6.1 million and KwaZulu-Natal had 5.1 million registered voters. The Western Cape had the fourth highest number of votes cast (2.1 million, and following just after the Eastern Cape's 2.2 million). The North West had the third lowest number of provincial votes cast (the Northern Cape has a very low population), and the Free State (second lowest number of votes cast, 1 million) was very close to the North West's 1.1 million. Turnout in the North West was 66 percent, which was the second lowest provincial rate after Limpopo's 61 percent. To summarise these trends for the four provincial case studies:

- Gauteng: 4.4 million voted out of 6.1 million registered (turnout 73 percent);
- KwaZulu-Natal: 3.9 million out of 5.1 million voted (turnout 76 percent);
- North West: 1.1 million out of 1.7 million voted (turnout 66 percent); and,
- Western Cape 2.1 million out of 2.9 million voted (turnout 73 percent).

**Figure 1:**  
**Comparison of provincial voter registration figures in South Africa 2014**



Anchored in diverse reports by the youth on forms of participation – conventional and alternative, and inclusive of social media participation – this study delves into the phenomena that provide the foundation for these registration and turnout trends. The study explores political interest, exposure to political information, forms of political engagement, and multiple experiences and perceptions of politics through the eyes of the youth of South Africa. It centers on prevailing modes of youth participation, both conventional and through prevailing social media.

The focus group investigation builds on the prior exploration of insights and experiences of the political parties (stage one of the Freedom House project) and now aims at establishing the experiences, feelings, and perceptions of young people about engaging with their parties, elected representatives, and government.

The study had the following division of responsibilities:

- Susan Booysen designed the discussion guide, with comment and suggestions from the Freedom House Johannesburg and Washington, DC offices.
- Group profiles were determined in teamwork by Booysen, Freedom House, and CASE.
- Booysen and Freedom House conducted the moderator briefings, facilitated by CASE.

- CASE implemented the fieldwork, in consultation with Freedom House. CASE also did the translations (where applicable) and transcriptions.
- Members of the team conducted quality checks based on fieldwork records, recordings, and transcriptions of the discussions.
- Booysen analysed the data and wrote the report, with report structuring and editing assistance provided by Freedom House.

## 1.2 Definition of youth

South Africa's political parties have no doubt about the centrality of youth to their future electoral prospects. They also emphasise the fact that the youth profoundly impact their operations both in electoral and non-electoral periods. A commonly accepted definition of youth in South Africa is that it encompasses all citizens in the age group between 14 and 35 years. The South African Poverty Reduction Network (SAPRN) summarises:<sup>2</sup>

The national Youth Policy defines youth as any person between the ages of 14 and 35 years. This is a very broad definition of youth. It is a definition that embraces varied categories of the youth, which have been exposed to different socio-political and historical experiences. A 35-year-old youth lived during a period of heightened political conflicts, when he or she was a learner in school, while a 14-year-old youth is growing up in an environment when many of the new reforms and achievements of the struggles are being realized.

The National *Youth Policy 2009-2014* continues, and the *Draft National Youth Policy 2014-2019* repeats:<sup>3</sup>

The National Youth Policy 2009-2014 is used inclusively to refer to young people as those falling within the age group of 14 to 35 years. This is based on the mandate of the National Youth Commission Act 1996 and the National Youth Policy 2000. This inclusive approach takes into account, both historical as well as present-day conditions. Although much has changed for young people since the advent of democracy in 1994, the motivation for 35 years as the upper age limit of the youth has not yet changed since historical imbalances in the country are yet to be fully addressed...

When political parties speak of their electoral support from the youth, they refer to a large subgroup of overall youth in South Africa, namely the group of 18 to 35 years of age.

Electorate age	Election				Proportions of voting age youth registered 2014	
	1999	2004	2009	2014		
<b>18-29 years</b>	5,834,918	5,877,131	6,283,630	6,376,383	18-19	41%
					20-29	76%
<b>Overall electorate size (all ages)</b>	18,172,000	20,674,926	23,174,279	25,388,082	-	-

**Note:** The IEC did not release detailed breakdowns, such as exact numbers for each age-year. The closest of the available approximations appear in Tables 1 and 2.

**Source:** Electoral Commission, 2014, Voter registrations statistics, 222. Elections.org.za, various windows.

### 1.3 Aspects of youth participation in election 2014

South Africa's 2014 elections were the first time that the so-called born free generation – those born after the end of the Apartheid regime – was able to vote. South Africa's Electoral Commission (IEC) stated in February 2014 that 25,310,543 citizens were registered to vote in the elections of 7 May 2014. Over one in four of those were in the age bracket of 18 and 29 years (Table 1; slight variations in the statistics were due to continuous fluctuations in the data the IEC released).<sup>4</sup>

Age band (years)	Female	Male	Total	Proportion of electorate
	NUMBERS			PERCENTAGE
18 – 19	349,957	296,356	<b>646,313</b>	2.55%
20 – 29	3,098,577	2,660,659	<b>5,759,236</b>	22.68%
30 – 39	3,223,740	2,956,794	<b>6,180,534</b>	24.34%
40 – 49	2,693,943	2,313,558	<b>5,007,501</b>	19.72%
50 – 59	2,111,311	1,684,820	<b>3,796,131</b>	14.95%
60 – 69	1,301,401	963,313	<b>2,264,714</b>	8.92%
70 – 79	741,549	418,950	<b>1,160,499</b>	4.57%
80 & older	417,825	157,397	<b>575,222</b>	2.27%
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,938,303</b>	<b>11,451,847</b>	<b>25,390,150</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** <http://www.gov.za/certification-voters-roll-2014-elections>, 6 March 2014, figures released at the time of certification of the 2014 voters' roll for the April 2014 elections.

The broad 18-35 year category of South African youth denotes a total of 41.2 percent of the South African population.<sup>5</sup> The categorisation of available details (Table 2) does not permit direct comparisons of registration and proportion of the population. However, approximate comparisons of these details, along with age-band registration details released by the IEC at the time of election 2014, show that the proportions of youth registered as voters are notably lower than proportions for the higher age bands.

### 1.4 Methodology and research implementation

Focus groups are valued as a research tool when the objective is to gain in-depth understandings of phenomena such as the youth's experiences of democracy and political participation. Building on this, the study uses a series of well-distributed and strategically profiled focus groups to explore, through in-depth discussion, the pertinent aspects of youth political participation in South Africa.

Focus group studies can only deliver authentic findings if all relevant layers in the targeted audience – the youth of South Africa – have contributed their voices. The study is therefore designed to capture a range of important demographic dimensions. We believe that our 12 groups, distributed over four key provinces of South Africa (section 1.1), provide insights into how the 'political mind of the youth of South Africa' works, with important variations across dimensions of comparison. As the results will show, the youth from the four provinces and subgroups within the provinces frequently converged in their experiences and interpretations. This instilled confidence that the interpretations and conclusions will be sustained across the nine provinces of South Africa.

### 1.4.1 Themes for discussion

We used a detailed discussion guide (Appendix A). The recordings (done with participants' permission) were transcribed and translated (where applicable). The discussions commenced with a warm-up section around a set of optional issues (theme 1 of the discussion guide, Appendix A).

<b>Table 3: Profiles of focus groups conducted, November 2014-February 2015</b>					
<b>Province and community</b>	<b>Racial group</b>	<b>Age group</b>	<b>Highest Qualification</b>	<b>Employment status</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
<b>GAUTENG</b>					
Mabopane	Black	18-24	Below matric	Employed	9
Alexandra	Black	25-29	Matric	Un- / self-employed (5)	10
Leondale / Dawn Park	Mixed (1)	30-34	Post-matric	Employed	10
<b>KWAZULU-NATAL</b>					
Northdale / Mountain Rise (2)	Indian	18-24	Post-matric	Unemployed / self-employed	10
Nongoma	Black	25-29	Matric	Unemployed / self-employed	10
Umlazi	Black	30-34	Below matric	Unemployed	10
<b>NORTH WEST</b>					
Ramatlabama	Black	18-24	Below matric	Employed	9
Ikageng	Black	25-29	Matric	Employed / student	10
Phokeng	Black	30-34	Post-matric	Unemployed / self-employed	10
<b>WESTERN CAPE</b>					
Cape Town / Gugulethu	Mixed (3)	21-24	Post-matric / students	Un- / part-time employed	9
Belville / Kuils River	White	25-29	Below matric / matric	Un- / self- / employed (4)	10
Bongolethu	Black	30-34	Matric	Unemployed / employed	10
<b>Notes:</b>					
(1) Black, coloured and Indian background participants.					
(2) From the Pietermaritzburg suburbs surrounding Northdale. Middle-class participants unemployed but cared for by parents.					
(3) Coloured, black and Indian background participants.					
(4) Thus a blend of all three employment categories					
(5) Self-employed refers to minimally and informally self-employed, as a substitute for a formal job. All un- / self-employed participants were in effect of unemployed status, also having described themselves as 'unemployed'.					

The discussions next considered the life of young people in South Africa (theme 2), just beyond the 20 year mark of democracy. The focus was on issues that young people confront, ranging from unemployment to social decay.

Participants voiced appreciation for things that had been going well, but negative perceptions predominated.<sup>6</sup> The youths were also asked to compare their lives with those of the previous generation and the first post-apartheid cohort of youth.<sup>7</sup>

Discussions of political interest followed (theme 3), starting with generic declarations of interest. As concrete elaboration, participants were asked about having registered (theme 4) and voted (theme 5) for elections in 2014 (or, in the case of older youth, for elections prior to 2014). The reasons for decisions to register and vote (or not) delivered substantive discussions. Further measures of political interest followed, focusing on political events that interested participants. All of the new institutional and protest politics and issues of high-level government corruption stimulated interest.

Participants next talked about the range of their political engagement (theme 6), including engagement through the social media and traditional modes of participation. They shared their impressions of the scope for political participation and impact on political decisions at national or local level. Parts of the discussion centered on political information; that being how much such information had been received and could be used to mobilise for participation (theme 7). The final part of the discussions centered on social media, information and the potential for democracy apps to facilitate two-way, informed and responsive democracy (theme 8 in Appendix A).

## 1.4.2 Recruiting the focus groups

Freedom House took great care to comply with rigorous recruitment criteria. CASE teams were dispatched to the designated communities in the days before the scheduled discussion dates in order to recruit and confirm recruitments. The details of the recruitment parameters are outlined in Table 3. The main recruitment parameters were age, racial group, gender, employment status, highest qualification, and metro-urban-rural spread (see map 1).

**Age:** Three different sub-age groups within the broad South African category of voting-age youth, which ranges from 18-35 years, were differentiated for recruitment purposes. These were 18-24, 25-29 and 30-34 years. Youth is generally defined as commencing at 15 years of age, but given that the 15-17 year-olds are pre-voting age they were not included in the study. The study also considers the possibility that there could be differences between the age sub-groups' views. Mabopane, Northdale and Ramatlabama were the groups that focused specifically on the 18-24-year olds; whereas the Cape Town group also captured members from this age sub-group albeit the youngest participant in this group was 21 years old. Alexandra, Nongoma, Ikageng and Bellville groups included 25-29 year olds, and the Leondale, Umlazi, Phokeng and Bongolethu groups included 30-34 year olds.

**Racial group:** All four conventional 'racial group' designations were covered in the focus groups. The groups were predominantly black (or black-African), a few were 'mixed-black' or with black-African, coloured, and a small number of Indian participants. There was one designated Indian youth group in KwaZulu-Natal. The white groups were scheduled to have been represented in the mixed-race groups of Cape Town and Leondale; however, recruited white participants did not arrive on the days the groups were held. A supplementary white group was hence scheduled to ensure that the project would include voices of all four racially designated groups.

**Gender:** All focus groups were mixed-gender. Given the youth status of the groups and the decline of gender differentiation and sensitivity in South African society – at least in so far as gender as a barrier to voicing opinion freely in the presence of the opposite gender is concerned – all groups were designated as gender inclusive.

**Educational level, also as proxy for class:** It was important for this study to represent voices from all significant educational levels. Hence, three categories were defined for recruitment purposes, namely below matric, matric, and some post-matric qualification. Educational background in this study is also used as proxy for 'class.' The four groups that are considered 'middle class' are those with post-matric qualifications, namely Phokeng, Leondale, Cape Town, and Northdale. Lowest on the social ladder, as indicated by education, are Ramatlabama, Umlazi, and Mabopane. The groups in the middle are Bongolethu, Alexandra, Ikageng, and Nongoma.

**Employment status:** It was crucial to reflect the voices from all sides of South Africa's employment-unemployment divide (see Table 4). In recruitment, participants self-defined their employment status. Both from the recruitment process and the subsequent discussions it was clear that 'employment' is an intricately graded concept. Employment in the eyes of the participants largely refers to formal employment, or at least engagement in

terms of an ongoing contract and with some sense of permanency. Piece jobs, Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) jobs, some forms of self-employment (hair-braiding was one example) did not preclude participants from designating themselves as unemployed. The unemployed ones in this study were nevertheless overwhelmingly entirely unemployed.

**Geographic and rural-urban:** The geographic designations names of the focus groups in this study serve as broad convenience designations only (Appendix B gives the geographic details of recruitment). Each of the groups hosted participants from broader geographical areas than simply the area that is indicated by the group name. Across the four provinces the geographical areas for recruitment also took account of the need to have all of metropolitan (where relevant), small to medium size towns, and rural areas represented. In all four provinces care was taken to have a fair geographical spread to ensure that the groups would be reasonably distributed across regions within the provinces.

**Table 4:  
Labour force comparative trends for 15-34 versus 35-64 year-olds, 2008-2014**

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
<b>Youth 15-34 years (thousand)</b>							
Population 15-34 years	18,209	18,404	18,608	18,824	19,053	19,283	19,504
Labour force	9,596	9,489	9,005	8,923	9,146	9,171	9,390
Employed	6,460	6,296	5,789	5,704	5,874	5,850	6,000
Unemployed	3,136	3,194	3,215	3,220	3,273	3,321	3,390
Not economically active	8,612	8,915	9,603	9,901	9,907	10,112	10,114
<b>Rates (%)</b>							
Unemployment	32.7	33.7	35.7	36.1	35.8	36.2	36.1
Labour absorption	35.5	34.2	31.1	30.3	30.8	30.3	30.8
Labour force participation	52.7	51.6	48.4	47.4	48.0	47.6	48.1
<b>Adults 35-64 years (thousand)</b>							
Population 35-64 years	13,336	13,731	14,125	14,511	14,892	15,275	15,672
Labour force	9,212	9,493	9,405	9,577	9,907	10,249	10,732
Employed	7,977	8,320	8,008	8,200	8,410	8,708	9,054
Unemployed	1,235	1,173	1,397	1,378	1,496	1,541	1,677
Not economically active	4,124	4,238	4,720	4,933	4,985	5,026	4,941
<b>Rates (%)</b>							
Unemployment	13.4	12.4	14.9	14.4	15.1	15.0	15.6
Labour absorption	59.8	60.6	56.7	56.5	56.5	57.0	57.8
Labour force participation	69.1	69.1	66.6	66.0	66.5	67.1	68.5
<b>Source:</b> <a href="https://www.google.com/search?q=National+and+provincial+labour+market%3A+Long-term+unemployment%2C+Qtr+3%2C+2008-2014&amp;ie=utf-8&amp;oe=utf-8">https://www.google.com/search?q=National+and+provincial+labour+market%3A+Long-term+unemployment%2C+Qtr+3%2C+2008-2014&amp;ie=utf-8&amp;oe=utf-8</a> , accessed 2 January 2015. Statistics up to the first quarter of 2014 (latest data available on this long term report comparative report)							

The focus groups comprised 9-10 participants, all meticulously recruited in terms of demographic and geographic criteria (Table 3; Appendix B). The discussions lasted about two hours. Participants received a modest honorarium. The discussions commenced in late November 2014 and were completed by mid-December 2014, with the exception of the white group, which took place in February 2015.

## 1.5 Analysis and the use of quotations

The experiences, observations, and words of the youth of South Africa are central to the analysis. The focus group data enabled the researcher-analyst to 'step into the minds' of young South Africans, capture their voices and identify the trends. The participants' words are central to the analysis. The report uses direct quotations to illustrate the arguments and build the evidence of trends. The quotations are often insightful and colorful. At other times, they are straightforward words that accumulate across the different groups and signal trends. The report's emphasis is on reproducing as many direct quotations as feasible. It simultaneously strives to provide a spread across the four provinces. At times comparable quotations are all cited, even if this borders on duplication. In such instances the multiple citations serve to indicate strength of shared conviction, with the same sentiment coming from multiple group members, or from multiple groups across the recruitment parameters.

The quotations are given as close as possible to the original words, which often had to be translated to English. The translations were edited lightly in order to conform approximately to standard English expression. The participants' words are not censored or filtered for political correctness. When they criticize political leaders or parties, or even speak about their own deviancy from social norms, the report records this. The quotations are by and large only a small segment of the totality of quotations on the theme at hand. All quotations are referenced according to the geographic location of the group.

## 1.6 Report structure

The youth of South Africa's experiences and subsequent beliefs about democracy and political participation are the dual thread running through the report and analysis:

**Section 2** assesses the young South Africans' perspectives on their lives 20 years plus into South Africa's democracy.

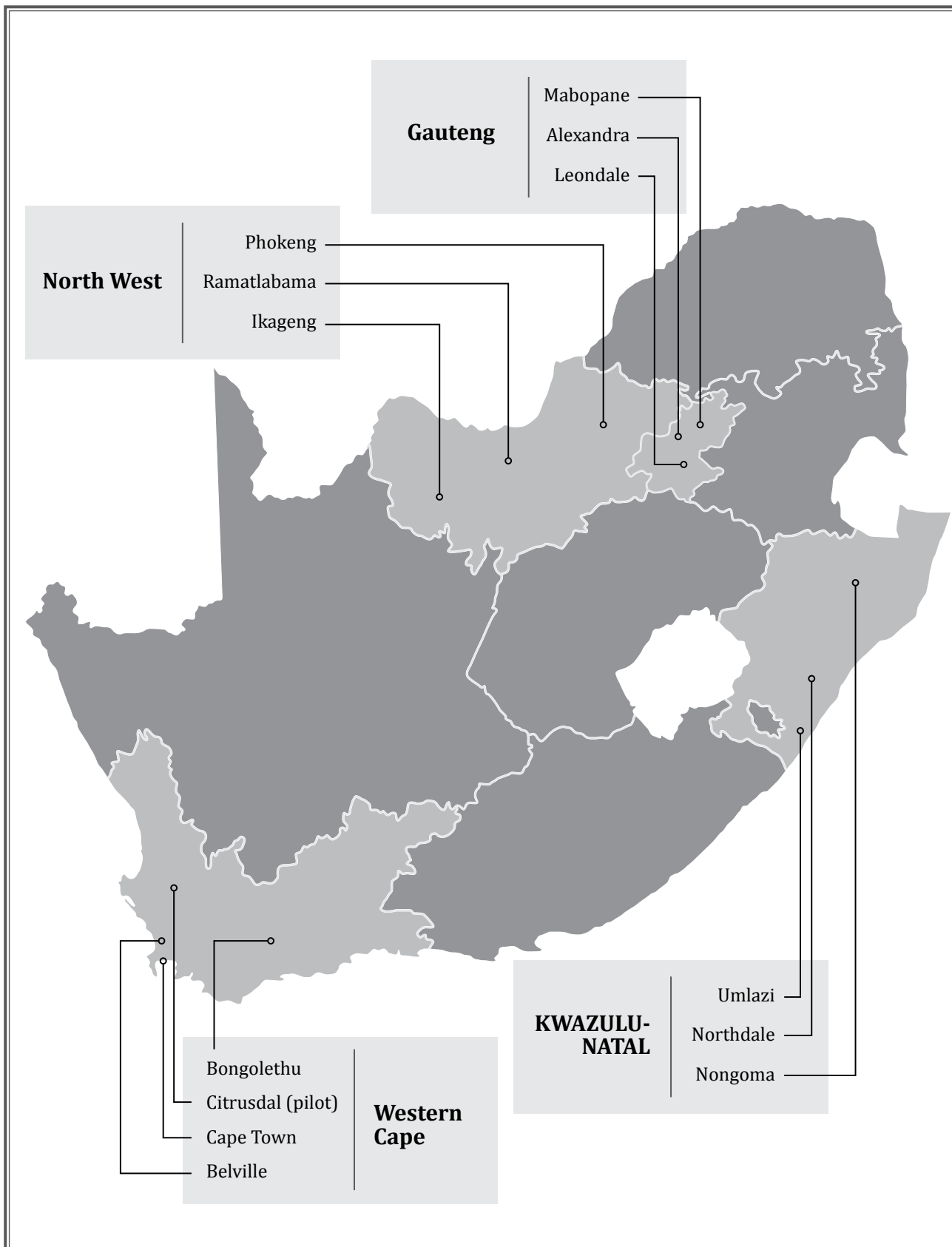
**Section 3** focuses on political interest, political participation (especially electoral behaviour such as voter registration and voting) and events that trigger political interest, also in the period subsequent to the 2014 elections.

**Section 4** deals with young South Africans' views of public participation beyond electoral behaviour. It also delves into their sources and their usages of political information.

**Section 5** explores these young citizens' perspectives on political participation and social media, and the possibilities these young people see for a democracy app to help strengthen representative and electoral democracy.



**Map 1:**  
**Geographical location of the focus groups**



## 2

## Young South Africans' lives 20 years plus into democracy

### 2.1 Introduction

Young people in South Africa, 20 years plus into democracy, live in the aftermath of the great moments of South African history – the oppression, liberation struggle (internal and external), the unbanning of political organisations and release of political prisoners, the constitutional negotiations, and liberation elections. The young people in this study were either born-frees (born in 1994 or later) or had their formative years in the time of early democratic government – when opportunities were expanding and human rights being realised. They did not have to fight the battles of their parents or grandparents. Yet, it was hardly a case of the doors of opportunity to a land of milk and honey that opened unambiguously before them.

This section assesses the 'now generation' courtesy of the guidance that their own words provide. It is a generation that recognizes that many of the battles have been fought – and even won – for them. Yet, the life bequeathed on them has been falling far short of the fulfilled dreams that arrived courtesy of '1994.' They have and enjoy so much more, yet simultaneously suffer immeasurable hardship and disappointment. They live a life in the shadows of unemployment. They wonder if the earlier youth generation (the one of 1994) had actually scooped up and consumed the benefits that were supposed to have come to the youth more generally.

These members of the 'now generation' live the fruits of liberation, but also the realities of social decay, including widespread substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, failed education, and absolutely failed efforts to access formal, decent employment. Even those who have succeeded on the educational and employment fronts find themselves surrounded by the adverse stories. They bear the witness to decay and crime due to the need, as they argue, 'just to get food on the table.'

Those from the 'white side' of the racial divide (with the Belville group as illustration) note the reality of a lost generation generally, but for them it is largely about the identity crisis that they suffer in the aftermath of the apartheid era. They want to get away from the racial politics and forced racial identities. They appreciate their new freedom, and appreciate the new friends they have across racial barriers. Yet they feel that politics is pulling them back into that racial rut. They talk about the resulting hurt and the identity crisis that they suffer.

### 2.2 The scourges of the 'now generation'

Post-liberation optimism, centring on a belief that a great future lies ahead for the young people of South Africa, seems to have evaporated. As the Cape Town group argued, optimism is essentially unrealistic. Today's under-25 component of the youth generation is invariably aware that opportunities have shrunk. They know they have rights, and are thoroughly aware that basic conditions for millions of South Africans (and in particular poor South Africans) have improved and that there is a social wage, relatively free education, some housing and accessible basic health care. Yet, they frequently suffer from pessimism and desperation when it comes to the possibility of their own circumstances improving. The groups articulate sentiments of 'hurt' due to social decay and broken families. The dual scourge of insufficient levels of job creation in South Africa and education that fails to bridge the gap into employment has caught up with the youth, especially with the second decaders (those of 18-25 years old in particular).

Some discussions refer to South Africa's achievement of freedom and specifically the freedom of movement, association, and speech. 'Twenty years ago you could not just mix and meet with anyone [from other racial groups] for coffee, or walk in the street with anyone. It is easy for us now to join as one' is the experience shared in the Belville group. The words 'we have freedom without jobs' reverberated across the discussions.

### 2.2.1 Opportunities and wasted opportunities

Young people use a range of dismal terms to describe their present-day lives. These include self-oppressed, and 'empty brands with nothing positive to contribute to the nation' (Alexandra; similar sentiments in Mabopane). Their conversations are burdened with helplessness as to how to draw the connecting lines between present situations and ambitious outlooks for their own futures, and how to move from being victims of vast unemployment to making life work. They acknowledge that there are more opportunities than in previous decades – yet simultaneously recognize that they are not using those opportunities (the Bongoletu group is a case in point). They say sometimes they are their own worst enemies; at other times they are stone-walled by callous politicians and resources that simply do not extend far enough.

They often assume responsibility for things that have been going wrong in their lives. However, they identify government as responsible for many of the deficits in their lives. The younger part of the youth generation, those who are now 18-24 years old and thus from the second post-liberation decade, also frequently identify the 'previous generation of youth' (interchangeably either those of 25-34 years or the ones that were youth at the time of political liberation) as the ones who have scooped up the opportunities. The second decaders also regard their predecessors as the ones that had been taken seriously.

Many point out that a multiplicity of opportunities is not being used. They point to colleges frequented by young people from *other* communities, 'not by the youth from Bongoletu'. The Bongoletu youth observe that insufficient awareness is being created at community level as to unfolding opportunities. The sentiment is shared in other groups, such as Nongoma, Umlazi, and Alexandra. Programmes on offer are not being explained, and there is little elaboration to the community youth as to where those programmes could take them. They see teaching of young people about the educational opportunities that are being provided as the most essential form of service delivery to the youth. It has to be spelt out, but so be it – it is necessary for a generation that has suffered accessible but defective education. The Bongoletu participants see this as one of the reasons why facilities are often not well utilised:

*'You are left with vibrant young people who don't know where to go to, but you need to teach people about things so that people can get used to them ... it was never explained to them before and they don't know how to use it. So when you suddenly throw it at them they don't know how to approach it, they don't know where to begin.'*

Participants complain that the information on work opportunities and further education do not always reach them. In the northern part of KwaZulu-Natal, the Nongoma participants point out that during their time at school, the details on support to go into post-secondary education never reached them. Others, for example in Phokeng, use the well-known argument of experience: prospective employers insist on a certain number of years of experience as a requirement for appointment, but the previously unemployed have no chance to meet that requirement. In Bongoletu they lament that news, for example about learnerships coming through a local newspaper, which is only available in town, and not in the township. By the time they get the information it is too late.

#### Ten years along the right path and then things changed for the worse

*'I think ten years ago I was more optimistic because we were just ten years into our democracy.' 'Everyone had hopes, because everything seemed to be going along the right path ... then years later it feels like nothing has really changed.'* (Northdale)

*'The youth of today is far worse off, because they like the fast life. They are using drugs and want to get rich fast, so they get involved in criminal activities. Others are in prison or dead because of this fast life.' 'Some in the previous generation of youth died so that the youth of today can have a better life, but we are not using the opportunities ... we just want to have a good time.' 'Our youth have lost hope in terms of government ... policies and the constitution are not being implemented.'* (Ikageng)

*'There is regression. We are on a downhill slope. We are facing big challenges socio-economically.'* (Belville)

*'You find our youth entertain themselves in taverns, drinking and throwing their lives away as they can't attain their dreams.'* (Ramatlaba)

*'The youth today have unrealistic expectations. They're expecting everything to fall into their laps. Not wanting to work for what they'll get – stuff like that. They're just ... easy. And it's all about the swag [-ger] that I have ...' (Cape Town)*

## 2.2.2 Victims of unemployment or lovers of the wrong things?

Many of today's youth recognize that they themselves are lazy, chasing the easy life, or are unwilling to rigorously pursue opportunities (section 2.2.1; Table 5; also see section 2.4). Others in the Freedom House youth research project tell the tales of helpless and sustained efforts to get employment, only to run into stone walls of insufficient experience, nepotism, etc. They talk about feelings of desperation and negativity, and this confirms sentiments found in other research.<sup>8</sup> There are large amounts of self-blame, especially evident in the two sets of lower education groups. They see much that is being done by government, but they also see individuals in government standing in their way, or setting poor examples. By all appearances from group discussions, many of the desperate ones and the outright lazy-easy-money youth turn to crime. Their motivations range from simply getting food on the table to gaining a ticket into the fast lane of quick money.

### 'We are into the negative things, the wrong things'

*'We are more into doing the negative rather than the positive things that will make us prosper ... and yet we complain.' 'We are just empty brands ... with nothing positive to give out to the nation.' 'We do not have patriotism, whatever we do, we do for the now.' 'We are too lazy to think for ourselves what we should do ... I end up doing the wrong things.' (Alexandra)*

*'Schoolgirls are getting involved with teachers and they know they are not supposed to have relationships with older men.' 'It is the adults who are selling the drugs. So, older people are destroying the lives of the young people.' (Ikageng)*

*'It is because of unemployment that so many of the youth turn to crime.' 'Our government has given us empty promises, which is why the youth fill our prisons.' 'They drink their lives away. Perhaps, had there been projects they could get involved in they would have had something to look forward to. Instead, they sit there on the corner seeking recreational drugs.' (Ramatlabana)*

*'Young people have access to drugs. It's like buying a sweet from the shop.' (Bongoletu)*

*'Crime is high and it is because of the lack of jobs, people are going to bed without having eaten a thing.' (Umlazi)*

*'Youth today use drugs, marijuana; even when you tell them to go and work they tell you that it is a waste of time – the only thing they are going to do is crime.' 'You will find that at school you were planning that at a certain age I would be driving a certain car, have a certain house, but after school it is hard for those dreams to be achieved. When we do find jobs it is with sub-contractors who give you sweets or peanuts in exchange for all your efforts.' (Phokeng)*

The young people also seek out the reasons for the negative orientations and experiences, and often find it in the fact of young people feeling marginalised in society. Hence the Ikageng group argues: 'The youth feel side-lined. They feel they are not being taken seriously and that is why they end up leaving school and some of them have babies.'

**Table 5:**  
References to the main afflictions that South Africa's youth face

The challenges	Referred to by the groups			
	Gauteng	KwaZulu-Natal	North West	Western Cape
Peer pressure generally	Mabopane Alexandra	Nongoma	Ikageng Phokeng	Bongolethu
Media, music, internet take over role of parent	Alexandra	Nongoma Northdale	-	
Drugs, alcohol, substance abuse	Mabopane Alexandra	Umlazi Northdale (1)	Ikageng Phokeng Ramatlabana	Bongolethu
Teenage pregnancy	Mabopane, Alexandra	-	Ikageng	
Gangsterism, crime, or 'doing wrong things'	Alexandra	Nongoma	Ikageng Phokeng Ramatlabana	
Unemployment	Mabopane Alexandra	Nongoma Northdale Umlazi	Ikageng Phokeng Ramatlabana	Bongolethu Belville Cape Town
Confused identity	-	-	-	Belville

**Notes:** (1) Spoken of not in terms of own experiences, but in context of knowledge that these problems are out there.

The young generations are very critical of themselves. They recognize that much has been going wrong in their lives and that they themselves have often been responsible – rather than their parents or the government. Some (such as participants in the Alexandra group) even argue that about 80 percent of today's youth generation is corrupt. They describe themselves as 'self-oppressed.' Others, including Nongoma, externalise this oppression, referring to needing connections to gain access to anything that is generally regarded as a right or as available to the young people of South Africa.

Some of the minority groups – notably Indian and white – tended to speak in a more distanced manner about the same problems. They are aware of the issues, and are sympathetic, but do not have the same intensity of personal experiences of the problems (both Northdale and Belville are cases in point). They observe some of the hardships on the streets, and read about it in newspapers. They also 'feel too small' in themselves to 'step out and make a difference' (Belville).

### Minority group observations

*'There is always someone being killed.' 'The younger generation for some reason want to duplicate the celebrities. Sometimes it leads them down the wrong paths, they start doing drugs, alcohol, all those things. It just doesn't end well for them.'* (Northdale)

*'Things were a lot safer ten years ago than now ... because of the crime and stuff. Ten years from now you might not be able to go out at all.'* (Belville)

### 2.2.3 Between alienation and accepting adversity

On occasion the discussions reflect severe alienation and desperation, across provinces and youth age categories. This is the case especially amongst the unemployed. It is also evident, however, amongst the graduated ones who are just entering the job market. The youth exiting from post-secondary institutions talk about becoming 'accepting' of adverse conditions and poor prospects. They talk about former fellow students who passively accept that any job will do, irrespective of the qualification achieved.

#### Cape Town conversation

A conversation in the Cape Town middle-class group highlighted the high levels of frustration of graduates and other qualified people who are unemployed or underemployed:

*'I think young people feel like powerless. Whether that is like justified is another debate. But I think it explains a lot of why we can always point to other things being the problem [and not ourselves]'.  
'The previous generation of youth was ambitious ... but here we are, just having a normal retail job and we are like: "I am earning money, I can party, I can buy myself something every now and then"'*

Participants regularly anchor their negative perspectives on current South Africa – and where the youth of South Africa can hope to be going – in developments in national politics. They observe, for example, the gross inequalities in society, the fact that the gap between rich and poor grows forever, and that the same rules appear not to apply to ordinary citizens and the political leaders. The Northdale group cites the millions spent on security upgrades to a private presidential residence as an example that the leaders cannot serve as role models. Others make it clear that the party political fighting in government means that the youth do not feel they can look to these leaders for direction, as argued in the Ikageng group. The Cape Town group speaks about gross racism in South Africa and the current youth just turning away, rather than mobilising around it in a politically conscious way like the youth of 1976 did.

### 2.2.4 Peer pressure and collapse of socialization by parents and elders

Young people acknowledge that they live in the 'now.' Youth today live in the context of peer pressure for 'nice things, fast things.' There is much emphasis on social life. In their own appearance they have to have good hair, cool fashion, and great wheels. Most of the young people acknowledge that generalized access to technology has changed their lives. For example, their point of reference is no longer elders with whom they consult. Youth culture is carried by the media (television in particular) and music.

#### Alexandra conversation

The Alexandra group conducted an insightful conversation on the changing socialization patterns of young South Africans:

*'Now it is about style, fashion. It's about trending, it's about being westernised and disrespecting Ubuntu values.' 'Nowadays when a child is punished by a neighbourhood parent that young person will go to the police to report it.' 'My parents were never there when I grew up. I did everything on my terms.' 'We grew up respecting adults, but now the parent no longer leads and everybody is ignorant.' 'In isiZulu we say if you do not do justice to me when I am young when I am older I shall never turn back.'*

#### Other communities on peer pressure

*'A lot of things get us into trouble, drugs crime, there is peer pressure ... and we want to be seen.'* (Phokeng)

*'We don't take it from adults anymore; we take it from technology.'* (Mabopane)

*'The youth now live according to what they see on TV.'* (Leondale)

## 2.3 Life in the shadow of unemployment ... 'there is nothing we can do'

The youth cohorts in this study have the distinct sense that they have missed the boat. They live in a time of extremely high unemployment. Many have had unprecedented opportunities to build their education and receive state aid to pursue their educational dreams. However, not all have been able to access these opportunities equally, or use qualifications to get appropriately employed.

They argue that others – older youth or older than youth – appear to have filled the post-liberation spaces that have become available for young people. The jobs are taken and the new jobs are taken by those with connections. These 'connected ones' become the new upper middle classes, who are integrated into the political class who governs. Leadership positions have often already been filled and the incumbents have no plans to vacate those any time soon (also see section 2.5). The women in the Nongoma group articulate this sentiment clearly. In the words of one of them: 'There is nothing we can do, and that leads the youth to the things that are making them happy, being into entertainment ...' One of the men in the same group extends the argument: 'There is a lot that we are involved in that is all messy and that leads us to be the uncontrollable youth that we are today'

The discussions suggested that such resentment has not been turning into antagonism or hostility, perhaps because there is still hope for opportunities to join the middle classes.

One of the few things that young people believe they *can do*, even if still not with *guaranteed* employment results, is to try and please the politicians (or those with power over employment opportunities). Voting – in the case of this study voting for the ruling party – is an 'insurance policy' for a job. Young people in this study referred to it often. As they argue, perhaps it may not bring that elusive job, but they will know it is not through non-voting that they had brought this unemployment fate upon themselves (further details follow in the sections below).

### 2.3.1 Employment filtered by connections

The young people in this study commonly talk about needing connections to get ahead in life – to gain work opportunities in particular. Many talk about opportunities for employment that become available in their own communities, but the politicians and councillors in particular then recruit in *their own* (other) communities. As a result these young people often see the jobs that are on their own doorsteps being filled by 'outsiders' from other wards or towns. Participants in some of the groups have successfully protested against this (section 4.2.2).

#### **Nongoma conversation**

Many talk about their exasperation in applying and going for interviews, only to find that there is already an earmarked candidate in the line-up. Employment prospects are filtered by political connections:

*'We are under a severe oppression because whatever you have or want to have you only get through connections.' 'There are lots of job opportunities here, but they do not become available to us. The majority of people who are employed here in Nongoma are from neighbouring, or even far-away, areas ... they are not local ... even here at the municipality people are pulling in their own, giving jobs to family members.' 'Jobs are for those who are well-connected.'*

The Bongoletu group offers a variation on this theme, bringing in a racial dimension (of black-African people in an opposition party controlled province, the Western Cape, suffering racial exclusion): 'You hear there is a learnership but when you go ... they say they want other [racial categories of] people. So it is for certain people who've voted for a certain political party'

### 2.3.2 Cynicism about qualifications

The young people in this study generally aspire to improving their qualification levels, even if it is just to the point of someday completing matric. Despite such ambitions they harbour no conviction that higher qualifications – and in particular also post-secondary qualifications such as degrees – will ensure employment. They see employment opportunities at whatever level as wholly mediated by who you know and the goodwill of that person (sections above). One of the most common beliefs related to employment opportunities in this study is that those political

and public sector principals who take employment decisions will look after their own family, friends, contacts, and communities first and foremost. Being well-qualified does not advance their employment prospects.

### Qualifications 'get you nowhere'

*'Even the young people with qualifications like diplomas and degrees do not get jobs ... and it is worse for us who have matric only.'* (Nongoma)

*'Even if you have qualifications you would still not be working because nepotism is rife in government departments. Relatives of government employees are being hired without qualifications.'* (Ikageng)

*'You get a degree but you end up in a call centre ... as receptionists, clerks. Like, not the things they studied for.' 'Degrees don't hold any currency anymore.'* (Cape Town)

### 2.3.3 Voting as down payment for a job

Many of the young people see voting in transactional terms – they vote in order to gain a specific benefit which, more often than not, will be employment (the Umlazi conversation offered a specific illustration of this trend; quotations below). Across the groups there were variations on the theme of 'voting as transaction for a job,' as encapsulated in the participants' arguments:

- Vote, please the politicians, and hence do not disqualify yourself from getting a job;
- Attend political events, get a T-shirt – and then vote – be seen and make sure you are known to those doing employment after the elections; or,
- Volunteer in a clean-up campaign (or comparable community projects), make sure you get noticed, then vote and post-election you may have better employment prospects.

The young people know that the politicians generally and those with control over jobs specifically want them to vote. Therefore they vote in the hope that it will be noted, and that the voters' roll (voter registration) and their identity documents (voting) will confirm that they have participated. The rest – that they have supported the governing party with much control over public sector employment – will be up to suggestion or verbal confirmation. The Nongoma group said that wearing a political T-shirt might help get the message of the political party that was supported across (section 3.4.1). Overall, the objective will be to please the political principals by extending electoral support. It appears that in the time of bartering a vote for a job they want to flaunt their electoral choices rather than be discreet (unless they delude the politicians, but this possibility did not enter into the discussions) in the spirit of 'my vote is my secret.'

The youth also talk about the fact that even the act of voting, along with showing that voting was for the 'right party,' might not deliver the desired job. They will be contented, however, that they have done what they could and have not spoiled their chances.

### Voting to get jobs, but even that does not help

*'We are voting, we are voting, we are doing everything, but the people who do not have matric get neglected, they are not even looked at, their rights are not taken into consideration ... and even when they get jobs they do not get the jobs that are taking them anywhere.'* (Umlazi)

*'At the end of the day so-and-so [who controls a cleaning tender] would want to know who has voted for him ... and if they voted for another person those who want the tender will not get anywhere.'* (Bongolethu)

## 2.4 Crime, deviancy, and 'the wrong things that we do'

There are two main strains in the story of crime and 'wrong things' perpetrated in the name of survival for the large numbers of young people in South Africa who are desperate or veering towards desperation. (The consciousness conveyed in this study also shows that while not all young people are distressed, all have empathy for the less fortunate in their youth ranks.) The nobler version, reported by the youth, is that it is a question of downright survival. Amidst vast poverty and unemployment almost anything goes – from burglaries and robbery to perhaps



prostitution (vaguely alluded to) just to get 'food on the table.' The other version is the narrative of the generation that craves immediate gratification, that is lazy, and aspires to a flashy lifestyle – one for which formal entries via education, searches for employment, or eking out a 'funny job' lifestyle is not an option. The young people speak about crime and deviancy as a lifestyle choice. Part of this second choice is also the reality of young people often collapsing into the world of drugs and associated crime who soon find themselves without an escape clause.

Only a minority of the youth in this study have gone down the road of deviancy, even if by most indications in this study this trajectory appears extensive. One modest voice from Mabopane articulates a sense of some young people following the honest and conventional route to a modest middle-class existence: 'I see myself as someone who has achieved at least owning a car and paying a mortgage.'

### **From 'the things we do to put food on the table' to 'getting money the easy way'**

*'I am not working, but there are things that I do to make sure I've got food on my table.' 'These local officials are selling this land to the foreigners. These foreigners are now forcing us into xenophobic attacks.'* (Alexandra)

*'We like getting money the easy way – we do not want to work as young people, we so much like to have easy-come things ... some depend on making it in life by being thugs. Generally we do not want to work.'* (Nongoma)

*'I wish to be successful, but things are not going that way ... crime is all over the place.'* (Nongoma)

*'I also made a blunder by doing very ugly things.'* (Umlazi)

*'The majority of the youth have dropped out and they have babies, or steal ... that is because they have no-one to motivate them.'* (Ikageng)

*'We do not want to do things for ourselves. Rather, we do drugs and alcohol. After that we go and break into other families' homes, shops; we do crime.'* (Phokeng)

*'The youth of today do not discriminate whether it is weekend or weekday; they are drowning in alcohol.'* (Ramatlabana)

### **Umlazi story of crime and economic survival**

The Umlazi group, from a background of a rural area, unemployment, and modest educational levels, highlighted the blight of many comparable young people in South Africa:

*'People are doing crime to try and make a living for themselves.' 'People of our age group are smoking "whoonga"<sup>9</sup>. Some are sleeping on the streets, because you find at their homes there is no life. They are stealing, smoking this "whoonga" and the tablets.' 'They are mugging people so that they can go and smoke what they are smoking. And, as there are no job opportunities, there is nothing else they can do; they have to go and try to get something to live on.' 'I end up stealing, mugging and even abusing other people ... we end up drinking and doing crime.'*

## **2.5 Comparison with the youth who have gone before**

The youth in this study spontaneously group themselves into two youth cohorts<sup>10</sup> – the under-25 year olds (18-24 years) and those from 25-34. The under 25-year olds have the distinct sense that they constitute a second post-liberation youth cohort. The older cohort members speak enthusiastically about youth issues, but also position themselves as parents and citizens with usual adult responsibilities.

Those in the younger cohort reckon they are worse off than those who were in the youth age group around the time of liberation. 'Things were fine for the youth generation of 1994 to 2004,' they argue. The younger cohort see the liberation cohort as better disciplined. Some of the more professionally oriented participants in the younger cohort talk about the ambition and focus of the youth that have gone before them. Others argue that corporal punishment and respect for the parental generation, and elders in their communities, were part of that 'now-defunct' culture of discipline. Several emphasise that the liberation cohort had opportunities rolling their way, while the post-liberation youth cohort has a new struggle on its hands – one of fighting to find employment, struggling to steer clear of crime and substance abuse, and getting to a point where they can make use of the opportunities created for them.

### **Today's youth as the 'rights generation'**

*'The youth of then grew up under laws, but today's youth have certain rights. They have freedom of speech. Today's youth do whatever they like. The old youth was different, it was respectful.' 'We have rights and nobody must tell us what to do, we do what we like.'* (Alexandra)

*'The young people of 10 years ago were oppressed. They would get beaten if they did not wear a school uniform.'* (Ikageng)

*'We've got all this freedom but we don't know what to do with it.'* (Cape Town)

### **The declining hunger for education**

*'The youth of the past were hungry to receive education. They were hungry to get access to so many things that we now have.'* (Leondale)

*'The youth of 10 years ago understood the significance of education.'* (Ikageng)

*'Today's youth is not focussed. They drop out of school at Grade 11, then resort to alcohol because their lives are ruined.'* (Ramatlabana)

### **'The land has been taken'**

*'The past youth are the ones owning most of the pieces of land, on which we would have liked to do agricultural projects ... they are the ones in charge of these lands. We as the current youth are oppressed by the previous youth.'* (Nongoma)

### **Different values on lifestyle, money, culture and tradition; the freedom to pursue fun**

*'If you give R100 to the youth of then and today, I bet you the first will bring back groceries and the second a six-pack.'* (Alexandra)

*'We have more allowances and can do a lot more ... drinking, smoking, trying out all these music festivals. We've really got so much more. Our parents are more lenient ...'* (Cape Town)

*'The previous youth was eager to learn in difficult situations, and work hard; we on the other hand, when we get money (and we like getting money the easy way) .... We do not want to work.'* (Nongoma)

*'The youth of today love money. They waste, they do not want to do things for themselves, they like speed cash.'* (Phokeng)

*'The previous youth generation thought long and hard about their lives. They knew what they wanted; they didn't resort to alcohol and drugs.'* (Ramatlabana)

*'The previous youth followed tradition and went to church and their parents were alive to give them guidance. Today you find a 24-year old staying alone. There is a big chance of getting involved in bad things because there is no one to guide me.'* (Ikageng)

### **Employment was better for the previous youth**

*'The previous generation had ample opportunities and made a success of their lives. They didn't struggle with acquiring employment like we do today.' 'The qualifications and standards for employment are too high ... we are hungry for employment. We want to progress further.'* (Ramatlabana)

### **Declining value of sport – entertainment, taverns take over**

*'In the olden days there were sports and participation in sports culture.' 'Today when you walk down the street during holidays you see lots of children on the streets ... while sports grounds ... have room.'* (Alexandra)

*'Sports ground used to be packed, but now the taverns are packed.'* (Bongolethu)

*'The youth of today is more interested in entertainment. That is what is important to them.'* (Nongoma)

Equally there is a minority that holds the view that the *current youth cohort has it better than their predecessors*. This was, however, a function of whether the preceding generation was taken as the one that had grown up under apartheid. Young people under apartheid are acknowledged to have suffered problems with the education system, inferior living conditions, and far fewer rights, as discussed in the Umlazi group. Others, in the Ramatlabama group for example, reckoned with reference to employment that ‘the youth of today and the previous generation are the same – there is someone out there who was not working then, and there is someone not working today.’ Both the Leondale and Cape Town groups, both also on the higher end of the educational spectrum, referred to better technology-rated positions the contemporary youth enjoy: ‘The stuff we deal with and what our parents dealt with are polar opposites ... our parents did not have the gadgetry. They would play with sticks and stones,’ argued the Leondale participants. Their Cape Town counterparts observed that they are ‘more technology-wise; our horizons are broader ... there is a dream like we can be the people on reality TV ...’

## 2.6 Who is responsible for our plight – we ourselves or government?

South Africans have a close relationship with their government, even if they often criticize it or feel alienated. Equally, the young people in this study have great expectations and assign great responsibilities to their government. There is much that government does, but the groups almost invariably expect much more. The young people acknowledge that there are improved educational opportunities, but also lament that when they were still at school they frequently did not have access to information about these opportunities and how to access them.

In the time since leaving school, however, many of the youths (both women and men, and also many across the different provinces and groups in this study) have fallen into the no-man’s land of piece jobs and casual employment, self-employment no matter how meagre and modest, doing crime to put food on the table, or, often, outright unemployment and destitution. In addition, the women occasionally refer to further vulnerability in terms of sexual exploitation due to their desperation to get jobs.

The educational opportunities that may have befallen many of South Africa’s young people are easily forgotten in the context of the dearth of employment opportunities. These young people feel wounded by the fact that the ‘caring government’ appears not to have the will or ability to take care of its ‘children.’ They would have liked to see, for example, better information about continuously improving their skills and qualifications, access to data and transport to help take them to information sources and interviews, and far better impartiality in actual employment practices. Some stress that they do not even have the taxi fare to go get information, or to get to interviews (as in the Ramatlabana group). One of their greatest disappointments is that available or acquired jobs are of a poor quality, and that those who offer the employment almost inevitably favour ‘the others’ – namely people from other communities, those in politicians’ own wards or constituencies, and their friends or family (also see sections 2.3.1 and 4.2.2).

### Jobs for a select few and the repercussions

*‘People at the top appoint their friends, without looking at the capacity and their knowledge ... There is the concept of “Pressa, pusher and phanda”, used by the youth and it means get up and do something to survive in life.’ (Ikageng)*

*‘One government employee will want to sleep with you in exchange for the job. They know that we as women are vulnerable and desperate to get jobs.’ (Ikageng)*

*‘There are changes but people who are sitting in high positions don’t give young people the opportunity to develop themselves. Coloureds here in Oudtshoorn are in the majority and blacks do not stand up to defend themselves [politically] and make sure opportunities come our way too.’ (Bongolethu)*

*‘If you are not so-and-so’s friend you will not get anywhere. And that is the political leadership style that is set by the NEC11, and copied lower down.’ (Bongolethu)*

### Government responsibilities

*‘Our government changed things, but some of the things are out of our hands.’ (Leondale)*

*'We expect the government should do things for us ... (but) for a person to succeed s/he has to stand up for him- or herself.' 'Even when a person has graduated from high school we expect the government to supply us with work.' 'The youth is too much into drugs and alcohol, and next they say government is not providing us with jobs.'* (Alexandra)

*'Youth today wants things to be done for them ...'* (Phokeng)

### **Government not fulfilling responsibilities such as ...**

*'There is nothing that government is doing actually to help the youth, so that is why our youth is like that.' 'Our government is only doing things when they see the opportunity of getting something out of it, in other words they are not helping all.'* (Ikageng)

*'Government is not doing enough for the youth. Rather, they are contributing to the social challenges facing the youth. For example, they are not building entrepreneurship... Instead, they encourage us to pursue five to seven other careers.' 'Government has policy for youth mainstreaming, but there is no political will to enforce the policy.'* (Phokeng)

*'Why does government offer us a better life, yet not deliver? Our lives are not good.'* (Ramatlabana)

### **Ikageng conversation – expectations that things ought to be made easy**

This group had an intense conversation around the things that government does do for young people, identifying a range of such actions. Throughout they acknowledged the expectations of the young people that things must be done for them, that things should be brought to them, and that things should be made easy for them:

*'The government is trying. Right now we have FET colleges, but we the youth don't care about school ... we are just minding our own business and we do not want to finish school.' 'Government is trying to improve our lives through programmes such as "Love life" where they teach us about teenage pregnancy and drug abuse.' 'When they offer learnerships and internships they want matric qualifications and upwards, so they are encouraging us to get educated.' 'Our young people want to be given things. They do not want to go out there and search for things ... For example, I will come with information that there are posts at SARS, but someone will expect me to also bring the application forms to him.'*

The Phokeng group reiterated some of these sentiments and implored the youth also to assume responsibility: 'Everything is available in our lives, we must just pull up our socks and progress, and doors are open,' argued one of the Phokeng participants. The Bongoletu group remarked that in apartheid times 'doors were never open for us, but now there are learnerships and stuff, no school fees, bursaries.'

### **Ikageng conversation**

*The Ikageng group followed through concerning the government doing things, creating learnerships, or contract jobs, while these are 'not the things we want':*

*'They go to schools and tell learners about online applications and things like that. The problem is the youth don't want these learnerships and internships. They want permanent jobs.' 'There are groups going to the pubs to tell school leavers after matric about the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. So, there is no-one to blame, because everything is there.' 'Government says it creates opportunities, but it only creates these contract jobs.'*

## **2.7 The pursuit of opportunities – expectations and plans**

Despite overwhelming self-criticism and negativity concerning their current lives, it was striking that the young people in this study almost invariably hold out hope for better futures. A participant from Northdale figured this out: 'I guess no-one wants to say their future is negative. All are trying their best to have a bright future and achieve their dreams.' At times the desperation, powerlessness, feelings of having missed the boat, and continuous lack of knowing exactly how they will move ahead, rear their head. Nevertheless, few of the participants did not offer ambitious, sometimes humorous, perspectives on how they see themselves ten years into the future.

These young people recognize that things have changed for them – there are opportunities and government has been doing much to contribute to access to education. They now access learnerships and there are schools with low or no fees. There are school feeding schemes. Transport to schools is often arranged. Counsellors do the rounds to provide guidance. Yet, ‘most young people don’t care, they don’t care ... young people are not working, young people don’t bother’ (Bongolethu). At a later point this group argued that it sometimes appears as if young people don’t care, while in reality they had not been sufficiently informed about, for example, learnerships. They also have a sense that the information is being disseminated along party political and/or racial lines – to the advantage of the incumbent’s supporters, or the regionally dominant racial group.<sup>12</sup>

### **Sentiments of desperation and depression in future plans**

*‘We plan, but there is no money; you will not move forward. If there are no jobs you will not progress. You can see that in future you have to look out for yourself ... but if there are no jobs ...’*  
*‘There is nothing that is done for us, the township people. We are paying for water, we are paying for everything and we are not working. Where do we get the money for that?’ (Umlazi)*

*‘I think we need wake-up calls because we are the future. How are we going to go forward if we are so passive?’ (Cape Town)*

Participants often wish that they could do more to help society and their communities in general. However, they barely manage to look after themselves. In the case of Northdale there is personal optimism, yet a sense of sadness for the country: ‘I wouldn’t say I am depressed ... but there is a sad state of affairs in the country. But I am hopeful for my own future, as an individual.’

These young people almost inevitably see themselves as better educated and employed some time down the line than they are at present. Many hope to gain access to government employment opportunities – not because they strive to be in public service, but because jobs are becoming available and they still hope to achieve connectedness with the politicians and employers that will help them secure employment. One of their major reasons for voting (see section 3) is precisely to prove their good will to those who do the hiring. Quite a few see themselves in business in future: and in several groups ‘being in business’ was seen as an activity that is elevated above ‘working.’ ‘Being in business’ was invariably the preferred option. ‘Currently I am working but I do not like work. I like business. In future I would like my own business,’ argued one of the Phokeng participants. A Leondale woman also yearned for one of ‘those jobs where one works for five hours a day and goes to the gym for the rest of the time.’ Several see themselves as also advancing the interests of their communities.

The discussions were overwhelming focussed on individual achievement. Yet occasionally there was a voice that stressed work to help uplift communities, such as the participant from Leondale: ‘I want to run a large NGO that will assist young people.’ One Nongoma woman argued that in future she ‘would be a business person and at the same time be working in the community gardens, taking the produce to the markets so that the community will benefit.’ Another who currently braids hair from home wishes to open beauty clinics where she could train young school-leavers.

The young generation is largely ambitious, even if there may be vast gaps between their current education and skills levels and their goals ten years down the line. One hopes to ‘build something like a mall,’ alternatively ‘win a tender in construction’ (Alexandra).<sup>13</sup> ‘I pray to God to get a job ... only then I shall start to think about the future’ was the afterthought of one of the Phokeng participants.

### **Many plans to improve education**

*‘I don’t want ABET qualifications. I want the same qualifications as everyone else. Perhaps government can do that for us, then we can all be in the same competitive space.’ (Ramatlabana)*

*‘Next year I shall start developing myself because I shall be studying.’ (Bongolethu)*

*‘I could have finished a PhD and would like to have published.’ (Cape Town)*

*‘I see myself with a doctorate through education.’ (Nongoma)*

*‘I am going back to school next year to finish my course to become a boilermaker.’ (Phokeng)*

### **Linking study and work plans**

*‘I am studying, so in ten years’ time I do not want to run after a job but the job must run after me.’*

*'To reach optimum level is to start a business.'* (Mabopane)

*'In three or four years I would have finished with my courses to be an engineer.'* (Phokeng)

*'I shall be changing between jobs and looking out for tenders.' 'I see myself working permanently.'* (Nongoma)

### **Hoping for specific careers – like owning taverns and doing tenders**

*'I aspire to be one of the new generation of honest politicians ... there are really honest and genuine politicians, you know.'* (Leondale)

*'I see myself as a successful businessman, having something of my own.' 'I shall have two or three taverns, because the youth like to drink.'* (Nongoma)

*'I see myself in the line of being an engineer.' 'It is my dream to work in the hotel industry.'* (Phokeng)

*'I want to have better certificates and be a researcher ...'* (Ramatlabana)

*'I want a career that is driven somewhere ... not just something to get you by.'* (Cape Town)

### **Lifestyle and luxury item ambitions**

*'My future is bright because ... I see myself living in a luxury house.'* (Mabopane)

*'I want a house of my own; just to be able to move away from my parents, to be a success.'*

*'I want to be doing things on my own, providing for my family and driving my own vehicle.' 'I want to become a success. At least the government could help. Opportunities are not as available in our hometowns as they are in the cities.'* (Ramatlabana)

*'In ten years' time I want my own house and to drive my own car.'* (Bongolethu)

*'I don't necessarily feel like I should have money and cars and whatever. But I just want to be comfortable.' 'I don't just want to live pay cheque to pay cheque.'* (Cape Town)

Others, without skills, however, observe a disconcerting and growing gap between themselves and other youths who have managed to gather some skills. The Bongolethu group notes that the 'lack of skills multiplies.' Life 'becomes stagnant' because of their inability to catch up and compete with the skilled ones.

## 3

## Political interest, elections, and events that trigger interest

### 3.1 Configuring the South African youth and interest in politics

The study uses a series of indicators of the South African youth's interest in politics. First, it dwells on the young participants' declarations of how interested they are in political matters. Second, in a diversified measure, the study seeks stated evidence of this interest in the form of asking the participants whether they had registered as voters (for participation in the elections for which they had qualified), and whether they had voted. It also asks whether the young people anticipate that they will vote in the local elections that are anticipated in 2016.

Through these measures the study sheds light on contemporary youth interest in politics in South Africa. Political interest is not stagnant – it is prone to change over time. Studies of a decade ago may no longer be valid. Section 2 demonstrated the extent to which the current youth cohort argues their conditions have changed in comparison with those of the preceding youth cohort. Even in 2014, there has been a widespread assumption that the South African youth is apathetic, not interested in politics, in registering to vote, and in voting.<sup>14</sup> This study seeks to explore and clarify these assumptions. One of the points of departure is that political interest might prevail, despite youth choices not to engage with electoral politics, for example. It is also accepted that young people are astute observers of politics around them, perhaps especially when politics comes across as entertainment. However, they also live the lives of the 'average' South African. In their communities they engage with the issues that South Africans in general observe and experience. Political disengagement, to the extent that it occurs, could therefore be due to disillusionment, experienced futility, etc. – instead of an effect of 'lack of political interest.' The white Belville group, for example, plead low interest in politics and argued: 'A lot of people would say it [lack of interest] is a bad thing, but there had just been so much disappointment.'

This section twins with section 4, in which further measures of political participation of the youth are explored.

### 3.2 Declarations of interest in politics

Many of the young people in this study indicated an interest in politics at the current time (Table 6). Their declarations of interest were done by verbal indication in the groups. While it is possible that group pressure may have had an impact, there are two reasons why this appears unlikely. First, both the discussion guide's wording and the moderators' introduction thoroughly legitimated both interest and disinterest. Second, the in-group statements, indicating more interest than disinterest, were corroborated by the rest of the discussion, for example, on political events and public matters in general. Such high interest was not always the case. Many refer to recent political events (section 3.5) and the fact that livelier post-election developments have triggered their interest.

However, several indicate that their interest in politics does not automatically correlate with an interest in voting:

- They are generally *interested in politics, but will not vote* – largely because of disillusionment with what may be achieved through voting. For example (as elaborated in the section on voting), they have stopped believing that voting may push politicians into fulfilling promises, or they do not believe that voting will bring them jobs.
- *They will vote while they are not really interested in politics* (unless the voting act in its own right is construed as an expression of political interest). As the section on voting indicates, participants might vote even if they are not interested in politics (Umlazi is an example). Several participants stated emphatically: 'Yes, I voted, but I was not interested.' In most of those cases, voting was a 'transaction' to try and move towards getting jobs.<sup>15</sup>

The Mabopane group related this form of interest in voting and elections to the lack of elected representatives' interest in the tasks that need to be done while they're in office. What is good for the goose is good for the gander. One Mabopane participant remarked: "The person we are going to elect does not care about the country and the

nation. They think it is a title. After the election they are not fit to be there.' The youth thus see deficient interest in the job of representing citizens – why should the youth honour the system that accommodates such representatives by showing interest in it?

As a variation on this theme, some in the Belville group talk about their political alienation from a particular (white) minority group perspective. They argue that their individual, 'small' voices cannot make a difference, and hence they tend to lose interest – except when it comes to voting in elections. The same group nevertheless shares a sense of alienation due to the lack of representatives being accountable to their electorates, a sentiment shared with focus groups across the demographic board. As one of the Belville voices articulates: 'I have a strong sense that this thing called "accountability" is lacking in our society. We read repeatedly about malfunctioning, maladministration and mismanagement ... so people get to the point where they are just fed-up.'

A conversation in the Umlazi group sheds light on the contemporary dynamic of registering and voting. Citizens often go through the rituals, despite not being interested. They have a sense of being cannon fodder in political battles, but comply because they are 'beggars.' They feel they dare not stand out by not registering and perhaps becoming victims in not receiving more or being deprived of what they may already receive. An entrance ticket to delivery – finding favour with the politician power holders – is to show that you are registered and that you have voted. It is no guarantee to receive anything, and particularly also not jobs, but there is a widespread belief that it may be a minimal entrance ticket. No-one is prepared to risk falling foul and missing out. In short, to register and to vote, is the license to ask for help, for jobs, and for any form of delivery. In this world there are two classes of citizens – those who are registered and vote, and the rest.

**Table 6:**  
**Interest in politics – declarations in the focus groups**

Groups	Scale of interest in politics (figures in the columns represent number of participants)				
	Not interested at all	Not interested	Don't know or don't care	Interested	Very interested
Mabopane	-	-	-	8	-
Alexandra	-	1	2	7	-
Leondale	-	1	1	5	1
Nongoma	-	-	3	7	-
Northdale	-	-	-	11	-
Umlazi	3	1	2	2	-
Ikageng	-	1	4	4	2
Phokeng	3	-	1	5	2
Ramatlabana	3	4	-	-	1
Bongolethu	1		1	2	3
Cape Town	1	1		5	2
Belville	2	2	4	2	-

**Scale:** Group participants were asked to rate their own, individual, levels of political interest on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, with the following meanings: 1=not interested at all, 2=not interested, 3=don't know or don't care, 4=interested, 5=very interested



## **Umlazi conversation on registering and voting as transactions for delivery**

This is a summary of the trends in the Umlazi discussion:

The Umlazi group revealed in detail the 'transactional nature' of registering to vote and voting. Young people will go through election-related rituals irrespective of whether they are interested in electoral political or not. Acquiring jobs is the main drive. They observe that politicians want them to register and vote, and that this gets checked when they apply for jobs, or want to be in the line for a range of other social services. Registration and voting is thus a transactional activity for them: they vote and in exchange they hope to get considered for a job. They are not always optimistic that this will be forthcoming, but at least they know that they have not disqualified themselves by not registering and voting (and thus antagonising the political power-mongers and gate-keepers).

### **Umlazi on registration**

*'I registered, because I want the chance to be considered if those opportunities come along.' 'If a job opportunity comes along my names needs to be seen when they check [the voters' roll]. 'They check to see that this one is a voter and that one is not, and if you are not voting nothing right happens to you.' 'We are not sure what kind of people we would be if we do not register, we are not sure if we would be seen, and what the implications would be.' 'We live a life of begging. We do not know when the good will come to us ... We do not know if we do not register whether we will be oppressed.' 'I am fighting for my children. I cannot be unlike other people and not register. I should not be the one who is deviating.'*

### **Umlazi on voting**

*'Yes, I voted, but I was not interested.' 'I just voted because if you do not vote you do not get anything like funding, when they look at your ID and they do not see that you have voted. You end up losing on that.' 'Yes, I was just voting to get my rights as well.' 'I voted because when you need something you are told to go to the councillor. The councillor will just open your ID to where the voting stamp is and they know from there where you are.' 'If I go and look for a piece job or any job, they just turn the pages of the ID and check on where the stamp is.' 'I just went [voted], but I don't care. I just did it so that my ID would reflect that I voted.' 'You see, my brother, when it comes to voting time they go around making announcements through loudspeakers promising us many things ...' 'But then, when you go the offices to enquire about the houses they promised, you will be told "Hey, just wait a while, do you have the ANC membership card?" You don't really know anymore. Even if you were to look for a job, you are asked about the ANC card. Am I lying, brothers and sisters?' 'No.'*

## **3.3 Registering and reasons for registering**

Participants shared their perspectives on and feelings about registering to (potentially) vote in elections. The discussion was anchored in their declarations on whether they had registered and voted, or not (Table 7). It was important to establish why young South Africans register as voters, or found it important enough to invest in this activity (one of many forms of political participation; also see section 4). As a follow-up, section 3.4 explores the proportions of the registered participants who also ventured into voting.

Many of the participants related their motivation for registering to their motivation to formalise *their right to vote* (examples include Nongoma and Ikageng). In many instances the motivation to register was logically directly linked to the reasons for wanting to vote (the argument being that a person who registers is a person who is interested in voting). The voting section hence encapsulates many of the reasons for registering to vote. The current section focuses on the smaller number of cases in which the participants felt it is important to differentiate between motivation to register and to vote. (A small number had tried to register when the window had already closed.)

One of the voices in the Phokeng group, for example, illustrated this sentiment: 'My interest in elections is very low compared with my interest in politics... There is sometimes not a person for whom one feels like voting. I cannot see how they will help me should I vote. So I did not vote because I did not see the need.'

**Table 7:  
Registration to vote and voting – claims in the focus groups<sup>16</sup>**

Groups	Voter registration		Voting
	Yes, registered	No, did not register	Of those who registered
Mabopane	6	Rest not	4
Alexandra	All registered	-	5
Leondale	7	1	7
Nongoma	All registered	-	All voted
Northdale	10	0	-
Umlazi	8	1	8 (+1 voted before)
Ikageng	8	2	6
Phokeng	10	1	Indeterminate discussion
Ramatlabana	7	2	5
Bongolethu	5	1	-
Cape Town	Roughly half; exact counts were not taken		2
Belville	8	2	8

**Notes:** Opinions of voting need to be anchored in reality checks, even if self-reported. Thus, participants were asked whether they are registered voters and whether they have cast their votes in Election 2014, or in preceding elections. See items 4.1 and 5.1 in Appendix A. Indications in this table are by declaration in the discussion, as far as evident in the discussions and recordings. The total for each of the groups does not always correspond to the total number of participants in the group, due to some participants preferring not to engage on the particular question. (The tone in the groups was non-judgemental, with emphasis on reassuring participants that there are no right or wrong answers.)

### 3.3.1 Reasons for registering

There is a close call 'contest' in the reasons the young people in these discussions offer for registering and voting. On the one hand, they engage electorally in order to honour the liberation struggle and its sacrifices. Thus, they pay homage, are grateful, and show respect, often urged to do so by parents and grandparents. On the other hand, they want to please politicians, 'negotiate' or barter a vote for a job in an economic act that is far removed from the shining light of liberation. There are many intervening variations on the theme (section 3.4), but these two motivations stand out as basic driving forces that determine the voting act.

Young people's reasons for registering range as widely as those of the general South African population do. However, parental and peer pressure to register feature strongly. Socialisation to honour the sacrifice of the older generations to bring young South Africans the conditions of political liberation and rights are often in young people's minds. These realisations compete with the hardships of being the post-liberation youth, competing with earlier post-liberation youth cohorts, and being brutalised by unrelenting conditions of un- and underemployment. These harsh conditions largely motivated young people in this study to register (and subsequently vote), so as to

optimise their chances (so they believe) to ultimately win a job. Had it not been for such transactional voting the conditions might have alienated them to a far larger extent than what appears to prevail.

Nevertheless, a range of powerful other motivations for registration (and voting) also entered the discussions. These often related to honouring the liberation struggle, parental and peer pressure to register, citizen responsibility, to keep hope alive (for large numbers, this hope relates directly to finding a job).

### **Peer and occasional parental pressure to register**

*'There is societal pressure.' 'Your friends are doing it.' 'They show the ink on their thumbs.' 'They take their voter selfies.' (Cape Town)*

*'It's because my parents told me to register.' 'They didn't give you an option.' 'They told me "You must exercise your right!"' (Northdale)*

*'One of our pastors said we must register.' 'We registered because he said we must register, even if we don't vote.' 'On the day of the election my grandmother said "If you do not vote you must get out of the house!" ... And if you did not vote ANC she would see it in your eyes.' (Mabopane)*

*'It has become cool to register. Everyone was updating their statuses on Facebook.' 'I registered because I did not want to be judged.' (Leondale)*

### **Registration to honour sacrifice**

*'I am from the old school. People lost their lives. They sacrificed to get this democracy. To register and vote is my way of thanking those people. And that's just my commitment, for my country.' (Leondale)*

*'It is my duty to register and vote, to make my voice heard. People fought for everyone to have an equal vote. It does not matter what race, gender or socio-economic background you are: it is a waste if you do not vote.' (Belville)*

### **Registered to have a vote, have the option to vote, a voice, citizen responsibility, nothing to lose**

*'I registered because you can't sit back and do nothing. You are desperate for change but did not even register! And dint even vote! So I registered to do my bit to get some change.' 'I registered because I appreciate the value of being able to vote. Sometimes you feel that although you vote for a certain party it doesn't make a difference. But, I appreciate the opportunity to vote ...' (Northdale)*

*As a South African citizen, it is my responsibility.' 'Registering gives me the option to vote if I want to.' (Leondale)*

*'I was playing on my laptop, was not doing anything important and heard they are busy registering, so I decided to go.' 'I was bored at res, so I got in the bus transporting students to voting stations to go and register.' 'It was a way for me to use my new ID!' (Ikageng)*

### **Registered for hope and dreams to come true**

*'I have hope that my dreams are going to come true because my name is now on the voters' roll.' (Nongoma)*

*'I want to see change; that is my whole interest. It worries me that as a nation we do not really see change.' (Mabopane)*

*'I registered in 2009 when Zuma was coming into power. I thought that he was going to bring change ...' (Alexandra)*

### **Part of the dream to register to get a job**

*'I decided to register because I want a better life for myself, so that I can get a job and move forward, be successful.' 'I registered because I want to be recommended into a position in the government sector.' 'I registered because I want to be visible in the records, in the voters' roll.' 'I registered so that should opportunities come along, my name would be picked up.' '... So that they can see my involvement in government ventures and give me that job.' (Ramatlabana)*

*'Most often when you are looking for work they look in your ID to see if you are registered or not.'  
'The opportunity lies in the ID. Most companies are managed by ANC people. They check your ID.  
When you have registered it means [for them] that you have voted.'* (Alexandra)

Some of the youth emphasised that they had registered to ensure that through their vote they would specifically bolster a political party. Several others talked about registering despite the doubt they harbour about the parties, or not registering precisely because of that.

### **Registered to advance a particular political party**

*'I registered to ensure that the ANC gets another mandate to continue with change in South Africa.'  
'I am black but live in the Western Cape. We are not recognised. I shall make sure there is a party  
that recognises us.'* (Bongolethu)

*'I registered to help give my party political weight ... to ensure that my party gets more leverage.'  
(Ramatlabana)*

### **Registered but have doubts, especially about political parties**

*'I am so disillusioned. I think, no, I should not have registered.'* (Cape Town)

*'I did not register because I don't know whom to vote for ... I come from the ANC. But the constitution  
says one thing and the officials do another. And I did not have an alternative party.'* (Bongolethu)

## **3.3.2 Reasons for not registering**

Very few of the young people in this study have rosy perspectives on democracy, citizenship, and rewards for participation. They see politics as a game in which they vote and their votes will be rewarded with services and jobs. It is transactional. Hence, in adverse delivery conditions they become disillusioned. Their motivation to engage in elections consequently fades. These trends showed in the points contributed by those who had not registered to vote.

### **Disillusioned and uninterested**

*'I did not see the point of registering. I was disillusioned, upset. I didn't see anybody that I could  
vote for. We don't have a [Nelson] Mandela anymore. We don't have a Tokyo [Sexwale]. ... a Cyril  
[Ramaphosa].' 'There was nobody inside [the ANC] for me who was portraying what I had liked  
about the party before.' 'There is too much corruption in this country ... That rattled me. I didn't  
see the point in actually registering to vote... I didn't feel my vote was going to be my voice. My vote  
was not going to change anything; the country is spiralling down.'* (Leondale)

### **Won't get a job anyway**

*'I don't have a matric. So there is no point in registering. I won't get a job anyway. We know that  
those who are registered have the better chance of employment.'* (Ramatlabana)

### **Not interested in politics; do not care**

*'You see the politics. I am not interested in politics at all. It's really not my concern.'* (Ramatlabana)

*'It seemed like such a schlep... Besides, the work I had, there was never any time to go and register.'  
'I actually missed the deadlines, because I did not follow anything.'* (Belville)

*'I do not care whether it was a good decision not to register... whether they like me or not I do not  
care.'* (Ikageng)

### **Phokeng conversation**

A poignant Phokeng conversation in this group sheds light on disillusionment that prevails in South Africa on political representation and the availability of public representatives to engage with their constituents. It also dealt with the fallacy of promised delivery:

*'Most of the leaders promise the people lots of things and not deliver. If I also registered and went  
to vote I would in fact be encouraging them to continue to not deliver.' 'Campaigners lie, promising  
to do this and that. People are tired of hearing this song. They are concerned about promises and*

*nothing happening after elections.' 'It is only during elections that the ANCs and DAs appear on the ground. Others are bribing us with food parcels in order for us to acknowledge them. And then they disappear.' 'They go and live the good life and do not deliver on their promises. We continue to suffer.' 'They come and give us food parcels, taxis to go and vote ... but after that nothing happens.' 'The only way I shall register to vote is when campaigners put their promises in writing and sign them off. I am not going to vote if they only talk. Talk is cheap.'*

### 3.4 Voting and reasons for voting

The young people in these discussion groups are concerned about the meaning and impact of their votes. They often register and most of the registered citizens report that they also voted. Many voted simply to have a voice and to feel part of the 'South Africa project'. Some protect the victory over apartheid through their votes. There is little fervour and minimal celebration, however, of their acts of voting. Many are deeply disappointed and despondent about limited evidence that their votes have been working for them. They nevertheless reckon that it is a question of persisting to vote. Sometime in the future *things are bound to get better*.

There is desperation to be noticed as loyal and supportive citizens. Most of the participants reckon that registering as voters and voting are two of the very few tools they have to try to secure jobs. There is virtually no belief that it is merit and qualification that will bring the jobs. It is all about connections and finding favour with the politicians; hence voting counts. Registration and/or voting has therefore largely become a transactional action, linked into a chain of being noticed, finding favour, and being rewarded with a job. Many young citizens in this study also link registration-voting to securing other social services, including housing. It is in this context that young people indicate that they vote, even if they are not interested in politics

Young people are often concerned that little has been changing in South Africa – this is evidence that their votes are quite meaningless. A young man from Ramatlabama says he votes simply because his parents force him to 'place a mark on a certain party.' They do not have faith that voting brings services and delivery. At another level they also see a compromised transition-negotiation process in which the ANC had ceded too much. Black South Africans are concerned that racism is still rife, despite many having voted for that to happen in previous elections. In Cape Town, participants were shaken by a series of reports of racism in that city. They wonder how co-responsible the ANC in fact is.

In their decisions to vote (as in the case of registration to vote) young people still occasionally cite liberation, and the fact that they feel they need to protect the victory over apartheid. These ones talk about excitement to vote, feeling emotional about it, remembering that some people even died to help them get the vote. Many others talk about voting as a ritualistic action, simply voting for the sake of voting, and to feel part of the bigger picture. The largest number, however, talk about voting in the context of hard realities of current life. They vote to get them in line to get jobs. They feel they have to vote in order not to be disqualified by the politicians who have a say over the award of jobs. In all groups, participants continuously talk about hope and voting in the hope that their votes will be rewarded.

In general young citizens vote to make a certain party of choice wins – and then hope that this choice will be the key to getting things happen around them. There is immense hope that 'the right party,' if supported, will unleash the good things onto society.

#### 3.4.1 Reasons for voting

South Africa's youth reveal intense cynicism about electoral processes, yet they simultaneously feel they have no choice but to trust that participation will bring them (further) delivery and advantages. Appreciation for liberation continues to play a central role in motivation to vote. These youths talk about feeling indebted to those who had brought liberation. Much of the motivation to vote, however, has also become personalised around the powers and desires of the political class. As already evident in other parts of this study, young citizens observe that they have to court the politicians' favour in order to have a chance to find employment in a country where the public sector is the most likely employer and where the governing party is the undisputed gate-keeper. It is unsurprising that

participants largely vote for hope, for change. Their fates lie disproportionately in the hands of the politicians. This is a different type of hope from the 1994 style of citizen hope in South Africa – at that time it was about the new democratic political system working for the people. Just over 20 years later it is about powerful politicians (and elected ones at that) who barter for citizen loyalty and electoral support.

### **Vote, hoping for change**

*'What makes us vote is we have the faith or hope that there is going to be change if we vote. We shall be proud to know that it is with our voting that we managed to do this and that.' 'My wishes will now be heard, because of that vote that I cast.' 'Voting is for my future, the bright future for me.'* (Nongoma)

*'I decided to vote because I have hope. And I am going to continue voting because I still have hope that one day, maybe, I shall be assisted.' 'There are many things that have changed, but now it looks like we are again oppressed and we have to vote to try get better education for our children.'* (Umlazi)

*'I am very interested in elections, because my vote counts.' 'I voted because I need change in my life. I had pap and milk for supper and I expect the same tomorrow. I want [those that I voted for] to bring change.' 'When I first started to vote I thought I was going to have my own RDP, only to find that the government local officials are corrupt ...'* (Alexandra)

*'I voted because we need to hope that the person we vote for will bring change.' 'Rome was not built in one day. I do believe that after a certain time the coming generation will find things better, as long as I keep on voting.' 'I registered to vote to make a certain difference ... I was hoping things would be different. Even now, I am still hoping.' 'Every time I cast my mark, I get that excitement that hopefully something will change.'* (Phokeng)

*'Democracy of a country is never built in 20 years. It's very, very little time.' 'But, the other thing that is making South Africans impatient is corruption.' 'I was excited because I knew with my vote the education for black people can change.'* (Bongolethu)

*'I hoped that my vote would change everything.' 'I like the manifesto where it talked about education, fighting corruption and it gave me courage that some people are getting the message.'* (Ikageng)

*'When you lose hope you shut all doors.' 'I hope that even just one vote will make a difference, to rectify the problems we have in the area, and our country. I believe each vote counts.' 'I believed that my vote could make a difference.' 'You have a chance of changing things – it cannot happen if you do not register and vote.'* (Northdale)

*'We vote in order to bring change. Things can't change by themselves.'* (Leondale)

### **Conversations in Leondale and Phokeng: Vote out of indebtedness for the sacrifices**

Two of the middle-class conversations, in Leondale and Phokeng, delivered powerful synopses of the reality that liberation from apartheid injustice – and the liberation struggle through which it was delivered – remain powerfully present in citizens' minds. The citizens in this study are also conflicted – how much do they deny that changes have been realised in the 20 years of democracy because they are angry about the present? They ask when is the right time to start punishing an aberrant ANC for frequent lapses and embarrassments. The Leondale group also linked their discussion into lingering (and mutual) black-white racial fear. (The Cape Town and Northdale conversations, captured in the set of quotations just below, further contribute to understandings of how the youth relate to citizenship.)

*Leondale: 'I feel indebted to the ruling party. I may not agree with everything that is happening there, but I am indebted to them. And they have changed a lot of lives.' 'A lot of black youth use this word of "indebted" a lot, in the sense that we still fell indebted to the ANC. The ANC had placed us to be free to have degrees ...,' 'If we are going to have this "indebted" vision it will deprive us ... We have placed them in power.' 'You are not holding the ANC accountable.' 'Exactly, that is our dilemma.' 'I see the lives that have changed under ANC policies, every single day. So that is why I decided to vote. If I didn't another party could come in to power.' 'But nowadays, the ANC needs to*

*fight to convince me ... there are opposition parties.' 'There is the fear of not knowing what another party would do.' 'Black South Africans fear that if a white person has to come back into power the whole apartheid thing will come back again.' 'So, black people still fear white people. And white people fear black people. Maybe in two generations it will change. But the nice thing is that we have the power to choose, whether you vote EFF or ANC ...'*

*Phokeng: 'I registered so that I can vote for the ANC. I do not want to be ruled by white people again.' 'Yes, to boost the ANC, not the DA.' 'I voted ANC, the reason being they took us from apartheid.' 'As a black person, I read that many people lost their lives fighting to get the vote. So I was doing it for my brothers.' 'I shall take the same voting decision again today. I'd hate to see the white man ruling me again.' 'Every time I vote I still get the feeling I got in 1994 when people were celebrating freedom of black people from the hands of white people.'*

### **Citizenship, liberation, playing a role in the democracy project**

*'Voting is my right, and it gives me the right to have an opinion. If there are things I need in the community, I now have the right to stand up. So, I am expecting my voting to yield results.' 'Voting makes me a member of the South African community.' 'That's right, I have a voice.' 'Voting gives me the right to say and ask anything.' (Nongoma)*

*'I registered so that I am known here in the country ... so that I am known to partake in the things that are happening. I have to register and vote as a citizen.' (Umlazi)*

*'You are given the opportunity to vote, so use it! Even though it didn't work I used it.' (Northdale)*

*'I few years ago I shrugged it off because I thought politics did not affect me. Then I became aware and thought "Hah, man, maybe there is something I can do". And the more involved you become the more you feel you are actually doing something.' 'I felt I was making a contribution. I don't know in which respect, but it felt like contributing to something bigger than me.' 'This sounds deep, but there was actually a time when you were not allowed to vote.' 'As women and as black people, we felt good about voting.' 'Voting can be seen as something that is not important, but when you put your X you can feel that you are taking part in South Africa.' (Cape Town)*

*'I feel I may still be able to make a difference.' (Belville)*

Voting actions 'in order to have a voice' are closely linked to the belief that it is good to be part of the democracy that had been won through liberation. "To have a voice" is an individual version. Many of the participants believe that they earn themselves the right to critique the government, political parties and individual politicians by having voted. On occasion individuals in these groups used the fact that they had not voted in 2014 as an 'excuse' to duck some of the discussion items, arguing that they cannot have an opinion, because they had not voted!

### **Voted to have a voice**

*'I just voted because they say you can't complain if you had not voted.' (Mabopane)*

*'There is a need to exercise your choice because at the end of the day, if you haven't chosen your leader, how can you then complain about government?' (Northdale)*

*'If you don't vote for whom you think should rule the country you have no right to complain.' 'Your vote will count even if it is just to give one party a couple of seats.' (Belville)*

*'I voted for the mere fact that I wanted to have a say. I did not want to comment on anything without having voted.' (Phokeng)*

*'I voted because I wanted to speak for myself regarding my complaints.' 'They say if you do not vote you are not allowed to complain, so I wanted to have a voice.' 'I am not interested, but I vote because it is something I have to do.' (Alexandra)*

It is common for young South Africans to recognize that much had changed since the advent of democracy. They realize that they have more rights and realised rights than their equivalents in the time of apartheid (although they reckon that the first cohort of post-apartheid youth had it much better than they do). These 'reward votes', however, are not the same as adulation. Disappointments and disillusionment compete with celebration. It is also

not a simple choice for these citizens between appreciation for things that have changed and criticism of prevailing conditions. As one illustration, the Leondale group argued that '(t)he ANC concentrates on people on the breadline. That's where the majority of the votes come from. And they neglect the working classes. That needs to change.'

### **Voting as reward for things happening**

*'My gran lives in Langa ... The one day there are still these shacks, the next they are building all these RDP houses. I vote because I have become aware of who is building these houses.'* (Cape Town)

*'What made me vote is that there are things that happened.'* (Nongoma)

*'The elected person we've had has been doing good things for the community. I want him to keep doing it. That's why I registered and voted.'* (Northdale)

The young citizens do not easily separate the act of voting from their relationships with the ANC. There were many variations on the theme. For example, some vote ANC despite disillusionment with the party. Others choose an opposition party to punish the ANC, while their hearts remain with the ANC. This youth study hence tells the story of an electorate that first and foremost retains a relationship with the ANC. It might be an adverse relationship where in such instances they engage with opposition parties – but seemingly as an ephemeral act while they hope the ANC will still pull its act together. Voting against the ANC is to make the ANC aware that it is not infallible, '... to show the ANC that as much as you have been in power for so long, you can fall,' argued the Leondale group. They talked about being perturbed by the problems in the ANC, yet argued that '(t)he problems have nothing to do with the party ...' They are concerned, nevertheless, that the ANC 'was looking after themselves, instead of after the country.'

The following series of quotations further illuminate the theme of the ANC as a continuously central political party, despite problems of disappointment with delivery and disillusionment courtesy of low government ethics:<sup>17</sup>

### **Voting to advance and appreciate a specific political party**

*'I was excited because I eventually got this opportunity to vote, so much so that I was not worried who the leader was ... Zuma was mandated by the majority from the conference.'* (Bongolethu)

*'On that day of voting I was going to make sure that the party that I wanted to win was going to win through my vote.'* (Nongoma)

*'We are not living for us, we live for the young people who are coming after us. I voted for the ANC because I know it will give my child a better life.'* (Ikageng)

*'This year I joined the ANC and voted, because our councillor is doing good things for us.' 'I just voted because we have to vote for the ANC.'* (Phokeng)

*'We black people still have the mentality that if we vote DA it will bring back apartheid, so we vote ANC, even if we do not see change.'* (Mabopane)

*'We voted because we do not want to go back.'* (Alexandra)

### **Voting to choose an opposition party despite being ANC**

*'Our complaints for the last 20 years have remained the same. Funny enough, there is money, but only for certain individuals and communities. I voted to try and change that.'* (Alexandra)

*'I love the ANC with all my heart. There is no other party for me. But the reason I voted for an opposition was because of all the arrogance that came across from the ANC.'* (Leondale)

### **Voting out of loyalty, despite unhappiness**

*'I shall continue voting ANC, but can we keep our promises? We can't do door-to-door [campaigning] and every five years promise the same without doing anything about it.' 'People in the ANC are not unhappy with certain things. Each and every day we meet ... let us find a way of getting this or that or whoever out of the way...' 'The way things are happening now. Corruption, corruption, corruption. Corruption ... You may be an innocent, but you are a small fish in a big pool!'* (Leondale)



### **Nongoma conversation on voting as transaction to get a job**

The Nongoma group delivered a detailed discussion on how young citizens see the relationship between voting and gaining employment. The trends corroborate earlier matching citations and confirm how widely the beliefs hold:

*'We hear that if you are looking for a job, they check whether you have voted or not, and based on the results they see when they check you out, they either give you the job or not.' 'This knowledge is something that is out there, something that is spoken about.' 'We trust that when it happens that there are job opportunities, because we had voted our parties in, the politicians will look at us. When you look now, the councillors are the ones who are spoken to, the politicians tell them "go to your area and get four people, four people are needed to collect rubbish here in town". 'Maybe if you have a T-shirt for his party he will look at you and he will know that you are a voter as well ... not that you like the party, but [it is important to] vote so that you come closer to these people so that you get that opportunity when it shows up.' 'Honestly, my brother, the youth wants to see themselves progressing in life. That is why they keep on voting, registering and all that, so that we can see the change in our lives and our communities.' 'When the parties do house-to-house they tell us to go and register and vote and you are going to get a job. So when you go to vote you already have that hope to get a job.' 'But the people have been told a lot of lies.' 'Some have been lied to a number of times. Others already have the things they want and they are not bothered to go and vote. But, seriously, there is no-one that votes because it is a nice thing to do.'*

Many of the strains of this discussion were prevalent in the other groups as well. Altogether these points indicated shifting orientations to voting. It is no longer overwhelmingly for the sake of celebrating liberation and democracy (it is only occasionally about the honour of opportunity to participate).

### **Rest of the groups on the 'vote for a job' transactions**

*'I think voting will bring me a job, this time around.' (Ramatlabana)*

*'I registered and voted because if you do not you are not going to get this and that.' 'If you want an RDP [house] and you do not register you will never get it. You want a bursary to go to school you will never get it, you want a job you will never get it ...' 'I registered for personal benefits.' 'If you are not registered they will see, so there is nothing you will benefit from.' (Phokeng)*

*'I am told that if we do not vote we shall not get work.' 'Where I was voting, at the gate, they told me to vote ANC. They said wherever you go for work, departments and institutions, if it's not the ANC they don't give you work.' 'I think they are "killing" us. We are so easily fooled. We don't have much information. We do things [vote] under pressure.' (Mabopane)*

Participants also reflect on the question whether it is right for them to feel like the ANC and government are doing them favours by delivering on certain government services. 'We behave like they are doing us favours, but they are doing their jobs [that they are paid to do], and they had promised to do these things anyway.' The Alexandra group in particular was very critical of their association with the ANC, wondering whether they should keep a relationship of 20 years going just because they are scared that another party might take over.

## **3.4.2 Reasons for not voting**

The youths in these focus groups often declared that they had not voted in the elections of 2014. The responses in the rest of this sub-section are largely from those who had not voted. On occasion those who had voted also contributed perspectives on why acquaintances or family members had abstained. Disappointment, disillusionment and confusion were the sentiments that drove abstention (Table 8). These feelings applied to both government generally and in particular to the governing party, in most places the ANC. Some simply declared a lack of interest as their motivation for abstention. The anger also extended to the observation that the job-for-a-vote transaction is a fallacy.

### **Lack of interest as reason not to vote**

*'I wasn't interested.' 'I just did not care.' (Cape Town)*

*'I regret that I wasted my time standing in long queues in the heat just to register.'* (Ikageng)

### **No guarantee of voice, of being listened to, and feeling abused**

*'But will they listen to us if we go and vote ...'* (Cape Town)

*'It does not make a difference whether I went to register and vote or not.' 'I knew the ballot papers were going to be cooked.' 'They also just use the unemployed people to campaign for them and after the elections they are gone again.' 'Even in the SONA [2014] President Zuma just spoke two lines about the youth, the EPWP.' 'They only remember us when they need something from us.'* (Ikageng)

### **Disappointment with service delivery**

*'Due to problems with service delivery in South Africa I did not vote in the 2014 elections.' 'The ANC is pulling up its socks now that the EFF had arrived. Perhaps things will be better from now on.'* (Phokeng)

*'I did not vote, because in my community you don't really see things happening.'* (Cape Town)

### **Confusion, anger and disillusionment with the ANC and its leaders**

*'I am very despondent about the ANC. They started out as my heroes. Now I am completely despondent. I don't vote ... As long as the ANC is in power nothing is going to change.'* (Cape Town)

*'In 2009 I voted for President Zuma because I thought he would carry on from Mandela ... but in 2014 I found there is a serious decline, there is rising corruption ... So I felt our own leaders are oppressing us, so I didn't want to vote for an oppressor who looks like me. That's the reason why I didn't vote, because I didn't understand what is going on.' 'I am happy I did not vote because my vote would have empowered the wrong people ... When Zuma said someone must be fired ... for me that is the one who ought to be fired.' 'By voting I did not give my vote to another party, I just stayed with the one I had before.'* (Bongolethu)

*'When you decide to join another party ... other people will say bad things about you, like you have betrayed the organisation that fought for your freedom.'* (Ikageng)

*'I was registered but did not vote because I realised we vote for people so that they enrich themselves, while we continue to suffer in poverty.'* (Phokeng)

*'When the EFF and DA canvassed me I got confused, not knowing which party to vote for.' 'All I see is scandals, fighting and debts. I did not vote.'* (Alexandra)

### **A specific delusion – the job transaction chain does not work**

*'When these councillors come here to find people for work, they take their girlfriends, their family members. When he comes, he will go to another ward and choose his own people and then tells them that they should all say they come from White City.'* (Nongoma)

*'When people are supposed to be getting the jobs, out of the blue come other people, people not known in this community ... We have registered for those jobs but we are not even looked at. Nothing yields anything.' 'They call a meeting under the pretence that it is about jobs. When you get there it is about apprehending thugs ...' 'If there are any jobs it is about these useless, small jobs that do not take you anywhere. You do get into it, because you are desperate, hungry and there is nothing else you can do. Government is boasting about jobs, but these are not really jobs.' 'The hiring process is all about the ones whom you know, the ones you are related to or friends with.'* (Umlazi)

The young people in this study do not regret any of their 2014 decisions to register and vote, register but not vote, or even neither register nor vote. Whichever decision they have taken at the time they generally remain convinced that they would take the same decision again. There are a few exceptions, especially in cases where the community concerned had learnt about possible voter fraud. Some young people from Northdale had read about such cases on the internet and subsequently thought their votes might have been a waste of time.

The participants who had *not registered to vote*, or did not vote mostly believe they had made the right decision not to participate in the 2014 election. The predominant reason is that they remain convinced that their vote would not have made a difference. Alternatively, they cite feuds between political parties in parliament as evidence of

leaders who are not interested in improving the lives of the people who had voted them into power (the Ikageng and Alexandra groups are examples). The abstainers also tend to believe that if it is meant to be that they will get jobs – they do not reckon that their acts of voting would have made the difference. There are also some who explain that their abstention amounts to ‘divorce from the ANC,’ given that President Zuma, in their words, has not performed his contractual duty to lead South Africa well (Alexandra group).

Many of the participants have mixed feelings retrospectively about their electoral choices. Some now see evidence that their long-standing party choices will in fact not be fulfilling their dreams. Others wonder whether their decisions to switch their vote have been counter-productive. The ones who are most certain of their choices appear to be those who have been seeing some government delivery – for example payment of a student loan – and are now convinced that their vote (in this instance for the governing party) has worked. Opposition party supporters, such as in the Alexandra group for the EFF, believe their party has been making an impact and will show further growth.

### 3.5 Events that trigger political interest

The youth in this study show high levels of political interest – especially in terms of noting political events that they have experienced as interesting. They did find elections – and in particular the 7 May 2014 national and provincial elections in South Africa – reasonably interesting. However, it does not necessarily mean that they had voted. The level of electoral interest, however, appeared to fade in comparison with events such as the vigorous parliamentary opposition of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), the opposition parties’ challenges to the African National Congress (ANC) in parliament, and the allegations around the improvements to President Jacob Zuma’s private rural residence at Nkandla in northern KwaZulu-Natal.

One of the Belville voices singled out South Africa’s *longer-term* transitional process as the trigger to political interest: ‘We are entering an age in which people are not blindfolded anymore, whereby you have to follow a particular political party because you are of a certain racial group ... You are free and we are experiencing it. People are using their individual votes. This makes politics interesting.’

**Table 8:**  
**Group opinions on reasons for not voting – comparison across groups and issues**

Groups	Supporting or opposing arguments against voting					
	<i>Anger because parties only work at election times</i>	<i>Scared, because someone might find out my choice</i>	<i>Nothing will be different, whether I vote or not</i>	<i>Did not have enough information to make informed decision</i>	<i>Political parties don't care about me, why should I care about them</i>	<i>Voting is for older people, maybe I shall vote in future</i>
Mabopane	‘It is true; they don’t look at the things they promised.’	‘It does not make sense.’	‘The parties certainly continue their fights.’	‘We know about voting but we are clueless as to what is really going on in politics.’	‘They are only focussed on themselves. It is not about the areas they represent.’	‘Older people have more knowledge, but that does not stop youth from voting.’
Alexandra	All strongly agree.	‘It is a 1994 story. None of us agree.’	Divided opinion on whether their votes matter or not.	‘We have access to media. We get information.’	A Minority feel that parties care about them.	‘Voting is for all.’

Groups	Supporting or opposing arguments against voting					
	<i>Anger because parties only work at election times</i>	<i>Scared, because someone might find out my choice</i>	<i>Nothing will be different, whether I vote or not</i>	<i>Did not have enough information to make informed decision</i>	<i>Political parties don't care about me, why should I care about them</i>	<i>Voting is for older people, maybe I shall vote in future</i>
Leondale	Agreed. 'The parties promise and disappear.'	'We laugh about it but we hear these things. It is what people are told in the campaigns.'	Agree generally.	'We agree with that.'	'This is what we said on earlier points.'	'It's for younger people, we still have the future.'
Nongoma	Agree, 'it will next happen in 2016.'	All agree, 'Yes, it happens a lot.'	'No, there is a difference when you vote'; Others: yes, we agree.	In the remote areas, yes; also old people struggle with that.	All agree: 'We still hope, but over time that might become true for us.'	No, it is for young and old.
Northdale	'Yes, that is what happens.'	'We disagree ... but some people of lower education about the system may believe that.' 'In rural areas too.'	'You have to care. It's your country'	'We had enough information.'	'It's a bad attitude. It everyone had that attitude the country would be going nowhere.'	'We all voted.'
Umlazi	All agree.	'No, it is no longer happening.'	All agree. 'We have voted are it looks true.'	'We fully agree.'	'It's not the case. We see it all on TV.'	All disagree.
Ikageng	'Exactly what we have been saying.'	'This thing is happening right here in Potchefstroom'	General disagreement. 'All votes count. A party van win by a small margin.'		'They get people to campaign for them and then treat them like a bunch of animals.'	All disagree.
Phokeng	'Yes, it is true.'	Consensus that it is not true for them.	'Not really, when we vote it is more for the country.'	Consensus that it is not true for them.	-	'Voting is for everybody.'
Ramatlabana	All agree.	'No, that is not the truth for us.'	All agree. 'There are no changes, whether we vote or not.' 'Changes have not brought benefits to me.'	Split opinion. Much information at elections time, but 'many people unclear about implications.'	Yes, all agree.	-
Cape Town	Agree.	'Nonsense, perhaps in KZN'	'Perhaps change will come in longer term'; 'Government is helping.'	Mostly agree, 'In your face on Twitter', 'ample information out there'.	Agree.	Find this argument ridiculous.
Bellville	'Parties are not working to make RSA a better place – it is all about power.'	'Can see that some people are scared', 'government forces people to vote for a certain party.'	Everybody's vote is important. 'Even one vote can help win a seat.'	'We had sufficient information to choose', but 'parties hide information from us'.	'Parties only care about communities that form their support bases.'	'People of all ages have the obligation.'

**Notes:** See Item 5 in the discussion guide, Appendix A. The Bongoletu group (not listed in this table) had an unstructured conversation about non-voting and did not specifically address these six factors.

### 3.5.1 Politics as reality TV

Table 9 lists the top events that the focus groups noted for having triggered or sustained their interest in politics. It was notable that elections in their own right were not mentioned amongst these events. Tumultuous events in the post-election period, especially around the EFF and parliamentary processes were foremost. Given the interest in the discussions in general in television and media, it is clear that much of the events contained elements of intrigue, challenge, feuds and in some ways constituted political reality TV (Table 9).

#### Like reality TV or a 'soapie'

*'They are fighting for positions, and the EFF wants to take the place of the ANC, but after that has happened we won't see anything happening. It's like Generations – that soapie – it does not go forward.' 'They are fighting in parliament and I would like to see where it is going to end up.'* (Umlazi)

*'Our politics now tell the truth like it is a soapie.'* (Mabopane)

*'These parties always say the like attacking one another, but they never got to the point. But this time it's just like action.' 'The Speaker said "Sit down, that is not a point of order!" And you must respect it because it is a rule to prevent chaos. So that's why it generates interest, to see how the so-called Fighters are acting.'* (Bongolethu)

*'What caught my eye was TV in parliament... Things have changed in parliament.' 'Everyone is now interested in what is going on in parliament.' 'There are no longer smart guys in parliament.'* (Ramatlabana)

Beyond the entertainment value, there is divided opinion on whether the parliamentary spats serve democracy or not. Some were not impressed with all the rhetoric and the fights, and action that lags behind. Quite a number of the participants were concerned about the talking and fighting by parliamentarians who are comfortable, with food in their stomachs. These fights and talking, it is argued, will not put food on tables or pay for the water and electricity of the poor. In the words of one Alexandra participant: 'What keeps me glued is the fact people have words that can change the country, but they do not have the action that will uplift the society, the nation as a country that needs to grow economically and bring the people together.' Others thought that things have been shaken up in parliament.

#### Events and positive impact on democracy

*'After the election our country became a democratic nation. That was the beginning of my love for politics.' 'I found it interesting that so many secrets – on matters that are of public interest – have unfolded in parliament.' 'Two years ago they were just sleeping in parliament; now there is no time for sleeping.'* (Ramatlabana)

*'Julius has shaken things up, hey?!'* (Cape Town)

*'Our parliament is run by crooks. ANC members are the ruling party. [Opposition parties challenged the ANC] and now they are suspended ... This is not fine!'* (Alexandra)

**Table 9:**  
**Events that triggered political interest – comparison across groups and events**

Groups	The events								
	Parliament fighting	EFF attacks	Public officials, qualification	Cosatu and Numsa	Nkandla	Public protector	E-tolls	Marikana	DA
Mabopane	x	x			x				x
Alexandra	x	x	x						
Leondale	x	x	x		x	x		x	x
Nongoma	x	x			x		x		
Northdale	x	x			x				
Umlazi	x	x	x						
Ikageng									
Phokeng	x	x	x		x				
Ramatlabana	x	x		x	x	x		x	
Bongoletu				x	x	x	x		
Cape Town	x	x	x						
Belville	x	x			x	x			

**Note:** The table listings offer approximate indications. They represent spontaneous suggestions, prior to prompting by the discussion moderators. An 'x' means that the issue featured spontaneously in that group's discussion.

Other events that were interesting to the young people in this study included the postal strike in South Africa, the decreasing fuel price, the delivery and funding of housing, the public spats in Cosatu, and the ANC's war on the anti-Zuma faction in Cosatu, and the DA's antipathy towards the ANC. Even if not political, they also referred to the Oscar Pistorius girlfriend murder case, as well as the murder of the Bafana Bafana<sup>18</sup> captain, Senzo Meyiwa as interesting public affairs. This demonstrated, on the one hand, their attraction to sensational news and politics being lumped in as under this rubric. On the other hand, young people's conversations about sensational public affairs move seamlessly into the political. Inequalities and unequal access to justice, as a result of the level of legal representation that can be afforded, are highly political matters for these young people.

### 3.5.2 Youth cynicism, but they are interested

South Africa's youth are interested in politics but do not necessarily convert that interest into political participation. The youth's annoyance with aspects of South African politics speaks to the possibility that they are more interested in political and public matters than often assumed. They have opinions about salient public and political matters, and often shared these feelings and experiences without hesitation in the focus group discussions.

However, they choose to withdraw from politics or abstain from political action due to cynicism that is triggered by their adverse experiences of public life. Such withdrawal or aloofness might on occasion be interpreted as lack of interest. One of the Umlazi group's criticisms against parliament, for example, was levelled against all parties equally and concerned the perceived tendency of politicians to take better care of themselves than of the people. The MPs' fighting in parliament, remarked Umlazi, all have full stomachs while the focus group participants often going hungry. This sentiment is also noted, in different context, in section 3.5.1.

#### Parliamentary politics as signals of inequality

*'Politics used to be about the masses, but nowadays it is about those who have money. They are the ones who decide what happens in the country ... If the Guptas have not said it, it will not happen.'*  
*'The law does not protect the weak; it only protects those with money, the ministers. Each time the*

*law tries to protect the weak it gets bent to suit the other person ... If I am hungry and go out there to try and do what I can I get arrested for trespassing, because I cannot get into that property to look for a job.' (Phokeng)*

*'The ones who are voted in are the ones who will be getting the monies, and all they will be interested in is themselves ... and that leads to crime because people look and see that all the monies go to these people only, and we are not getting anything.' (Umlazi)*

*'It is constantly dramatic, but the dramatic is not for our benefit, the benefit is for the wealthy, the ones who are in power'; 'It is more about their lives in parliament, rather than about the lives of the youth.' (Mabopane)*

*'There is corruption in tenders. The first thing they do when they receive monies is they drive a C6319. To me this is the same thing as that the president does. If it is happening at the top, why would the bottom not also do it? We are governed by criminals; '... by old crooks. It is run by the most feared.' (Alexandra)*

### **Attacks on and praises for various parties in parliament**

*'People are talking about thing [in parliament] because they are comfortable, they have food and means ... and here we are, we have nothing. We are the ones who vote, but at the end of the day it is us who are in the worst situation.' (Umlazi)*

*'The behaviour in parliament is actually embarrassing. Parliament is not supposed to be about entertainment.' (Northdale)*

*'These parties are causing unnecessary friction. They are actually here to keep the peace and keep development going... If your leaders are doing that, what do you expect your followers to do?' (Cape Town)*

*'I am not a follower of the EFF, but I am happy about their struggle to challenge the ruling party.' 'People are concentrating on what is happening in parliament and forgetting about other important issues.' (Phokeng)*

*'Ramaphosa provided great leadership in settling matters in parliament.' (Leondale)*

### **3.5.3 Youth on democracy, political parties, and public officials**

Focus group participants praised the new dynamic and frankness of questioning that the EFF and new DA (the one post-EFF arrival) introduced into parliament. There were criticisms too. The EFF, for example, was seen as too irresponsible, too-“Youth League-ish,” and not making a substantive difference on the crucial bread-and-butter issues of the day. The vibrancy that the EFF added is appreciated, although the words of circus and crèche also followed.

#### **Opinions of the EFF – from endorsements to ‘circus’**

*'The arrival of the EFF brought a whole new dynamic. The ANC is on its toes, and the DA is also on its toes'; 'The EFF just comes and they shout and they don't care. They are not responsible about what they do.' (Leondale)*

*'The most interesting thing is the EFF fighting President Zuma about the monies that were used to renovate his home, and that he should pay back that money.' (Nongoma)*

*'I found it interesting that Julius' party was demanding that the president pays back the money.' 'When the EFF entered they showed that the EFF is red, and red stands for danger.' (Ramatlaba)*

*'The EFF is the upcoming vibrant party. They are challenging on issues that are key to how people view government.' 'The EFF challenge makes politics interesting. Because some parties think they own people and now they know they have to pull up their socks.' 'There are many young people who are identifying with the EFF, with the way it operates. When the next elections come we shall be interested to see the percentages.' (Bongolethu)*

*'I am not very interested in politics but lately I am also glued to my screen to see what is happening in parliament.' 'The way the EFF is turning parliament into a circus is very interesting ... we thought parliament is serious business, dealing with policies and laws.'* (Phokeng)

*'Malema came with a bang. I was quite impressed. I wouldn't vote EFF but I thought like okay, he's actually ... marketing the party.' 'After the EFF everyone is going on in parliament... My mom said: "Oh my word, I have never seen white people react like that!"'* (Cape Town)

*'The EFF has made parliament look like a crèche. I am not saying they should not voice their concerns, but there is a mature way of doing things ... You cannot disrespect people in parliament. When a child is new and does not listen s/he has to be taught the rules and sometimes in a difficult way'; 'The ANC [suspended opposition MPs unduly], they do not run parliament democratically'; 'I have learnt a lot from parliament recently. I am supporting what the EFF is fighting for in parliament.'* (Alexandra)

*'[The EFF] is actually causing chaos and has made a mockery and a joke out of our society...' 'It is not necessary to jump and say "pay back the money". [Malema] could just have said: "What is the plan there?"' 'Money is stolen. There is corruption, but people should not act like kids in parliament.'* (Belville)

### **Opinions of the ANC – in trouble but 'teach the history'**

*'President Zuma has come out in the clear to say that the leading party is in trouble ... that coming from his mouth! This is something interesting.'* (Nongoma)

*'The kind of decline the ANC is undergoing is interesting to me'; 'People were excited about Nelson Mandela when he became president ... However, to see what the ANC has now become!'; 'There is a difference between what the ruling party had become and what they say they stand for'; 'The ANC could be in power for another 20-40 years, because they have the backing of the majority ... And if the youth are still taught about South African history, it will still make them vote for the ANC ... There is that fear, you know, that something may happen again.'* (Northdale)

*'I did not vote for the president [with reference to Nkandla], but I voted for the ANC.'* (Ramatlabana)  
*'[What the EFF is doing] is a wake-up call to the ruling party. So, in a way, I think it is good for the country.'* (Phokeng)

*'The EFF in parliament is like a child living with the parents [the ANC]. There is always fighting.'* (Ikageng)

### **Opinions of the DA and EFF – procedure versus havoc**

*'The DA always does things procedurally. They bring forth their points in a formal way. The EFF, in contrast, just rocks up. They decide today we are going to cause havoc.' 'In fact, the DA has been responsive to the ANC.'* (Leondale)

*'The Speaker and Deputy Speaker sometimes become biased [against the opposition parties].'* (Bongoletu)

## **3.5.4 The youth's interest in the politics of disrepute**

Many contemporary events concerning public officials, including the president of South Africa and investigations into corruption, mismanagement and maladministration of public funds, along with other senior figures' misrepresentation of qualifications, trigger the youth's interest in politics. There is a base of cynicism. Indignity and disrepute appear to come with the political terrain. It is probably to be expected that the youth would not embrace politics unconditionally, declare high levels of interest, and leap at the opportunity to elect the representatives whom they do not respect and whom they do not expect will be particularly sensitive to their needs.

There are exceptions and the public protector in this study again emerged as a highly respected servant for public sector values. She was admired in the discussions. The diverse set of citations that follows offers concrete illustrations of high levels of political interest by the youth of South Africa. It provides evidence of interest – when it came to the events that dominated the public agendas they did not miss a beat.



### **The public protector, Thuli Madonsela**

*'It is funny, because before Nkandla her recommendations were never challenged [by the ANC].'* (Bongolethu)

*'What always stands out for me is her unshakeable character ... It is a breath of fresh air to see a woman being able to stand up the way she does ... She's always in control, she puts thought into whatever she does.' 'She stresses that she was trained to be the way she is ... if we have correct mentors around, perhaps we will find "Thulis" produced here.' '... women who can stand up against injustices' and '... not afraid to speak their minds.'* (Leondale)

### **Public officials and politicians lying about qualifications**

*'People are earning big monies when they do not have the qualifications they had claimed they have.' 'It is time you prove our worth through papers; it is no longer about the struggle.'* (Umlazi)

*'We are being led by people who are not educated. It is said Jacob Zuma does not have a matriculation certificate ... so how can you teach a "child" [the EFF] ...?'* (Alexandra)

*'Public officials are lying about qualifications ... it means people get work as a family. [Those who employ] do not look at your qualifications. People who are educated and should be getting those jobs are unemployed.'* (Phokeng)

### **Corruption, the president and 'security upgrades' to the presidential residence at Nkandla**

*'The ones who are in power, it is always about bribes, corruption. Maybe he [Zuma] should never have been president.'* (Umlazi)

*'The man in charge is abusing the state's money, but if I had to do the same I would be arrested. To me it is not fair that Jacob Zuma is not arrested... To me this says we are still not equal.' 'Nkandla is the cause of the drama in parliament. It's unfair. We should all be equal and the president should pay back.' 'It is like the president is now above the law.'* (Alexandra)

*'Every month there is just something new on corruption.'* (Leondale)

*'Let's look at the Nkandla saga. They know they are in the wrong, but there is always this play with words.' 'We have seen with the different scandals. Also the arms deal, the key factor is money and power. Political power just presents these individuals with an opportunity to further their own personal agendas.'* (Belville)

*'It is absurd that some guy wants to start a fund to pay for Nkandla... So many people do not have homes, and this guy wants to start a fund to pay the president's R200 million.' 'He [the president] is just getting more and more, and people who have no homes and no food are not getting anything.'* (Northdale)

*'I saw [on TV] that the president is no longer respected.' 'Our president does not want to pay back the Nkandla money ... That is our tax money; it doesn't have to be misspent like that. Even if he is president he does not have to spend our money like that.'* (Ramatlabana)

*'They are leaders but they end up being greedy and focus on themselves and their families. After Zuma another Zuma will follow... talking about education and qualifications, nepotism actually.'* (Phokeng)

*'It is about squandering tax payers' money... that generates interest, because it's your money, it's my money, it's everybody's money.' 'This notion of defending an individual will cost us in the long-run. There are vested interests... if Zuma steps down my pocket will have a hole.'* (Bongolethu)

### **Marikana<sup>20</sup> and mixed-pictures of senior politicians**

*'In the Marikana Commission you see who is who ... It implicated the deputy president of the country. We did not know Ramaphosa has shares in mines.'* (Ramatlabana)

*'The tragic Marikana massacre is the root of the confusion we suffer today... Malema is also using the poor to gain power as parliamentary figure.'* (Alexandra)

*'I like the fact that there is still a guy like Cyril Ramaphosa.'* (Phokeng)

### **Numsa and Cosatu changing South African politics<sup>21</sup>**

*'Numsa is changing the tone of politics in South Africa... The poor and the oppressed now have choices... People who belong to the working class now have choices.'* (Bongoletu)

*'In the future Numsa will pose a serious threat to ANC politics. It is interesting to observe the support that Numsa is getting.'* (Phokeng)

### **E-tolls in Gauteng<sup>22</sup> – support and opposition**

*'We support the people of Gauteng [who are against e-tolls].'* *'I do not see the point of high fees being paid for usage of roads.'* *'The money collected is to maintain the roads in safe condition.'* *'Is the government really not collecting enough money to fund maintenance themselves? Now they collect from the people who have work.'* *'They will end up taxing unemployed people.'* *'I think the money collected from e-tolls is helping people in other places.'* *'I am not supporting the Gauteng people.'* *'E-tolls are in Johannesburg and that is where the money is. Yet, those people do not want to pay.'* (Nongoma)

## **3.6 Voting in 2016**

One of the closing themes for discussion in this project was to ask participants whether they anticipated voting in the 2016 local elections. This discussion theme was placed right at the end of the study to see whether these young people – after having been 'conscientized' to political issues, including government and representation (if they had not already been) – would be inclined or enthusiastically inclined to participate, or determined to stay on the side-lines.

There were some variations within groups, but all of the groups overwhelmingly indicated that they intended voting in the 2016 elections.

Motivations to vote varied, but could be categorized fourfold (and this remains largely in line with the motivations for voting in 2014): (i) to vote for change and vote in the hope of change, (ii) vote to defend the post-apartheid order (and prevent a reversal to the preceding order of white supremacy), (iii) vote because of feeling obliged, and (iv) vote because the politicians could disqualify you from opportunities should they discover you have not voted.

Voting for change means both change from the previous order of pre-1994, or, for others, change away from the non-performing incumbent councillors (or other elected representatives). Participants also have a sense of great importance of local voting – given that they have greater direct contact with their councillor (or better prospects for establishing such contact), and thus a better chance of delivery and seeing their needs fulfilled. They also have a sense that in local elections there is less competition with the rest of the country for needs fulfilment (Alexandra). Politicians can make more realistic promises. Others do not differentiate strongly between local and national voting and argue, for example in the Belville group, that voting in 2016 could help reverse the 'bad changes' that are unfolding currently.

Several of the discussions showed – even considering that it was amongst somewhat alienated, distanced youth who are frequently highly cynical of their government – that the past of racial oppression is not ready for burial. Many of the youth are cynical about and demanding of the current dispensation, but also extremely forgiving. They note that much had gone dramatically wrong, but they remain prepared to say that the government is still 'new at it,' that the ANC government deserves time to get things right, and that they, the youth, have hope that the change will come. Belville's minority group voices, in contrast, plead for change via a strengthening of the opposition.

## **MOTIVATIONS TO VOTE IN 2016**

### **Vote for change**

*'We shall vote for change... because that is what they put in our heads.'* *'Maybe we can see a difference; it is quicker at the local level.'* (Northdale)

*'We want to see change and opportunities.' 'Yes, I am voting, Change is coming.' 'I shall vote but it will be conditional... If I see the change.'* (Ramatlabama)

*'I shall vote if the president has changed.'* (Ikageng)

*'We shall vote for hope. How do you live your daily life if you do not have hope?'* (Cape Town)

*'It is important to vote. Voting makes your party stronger.' 'Vote for change. That's all. Just vote for change.'* (Belville)

### **Vote in exchange for having a say, to get services**

*'Nobody is interested in what you have to say. If you have not voted, you can forget.'* (Leondale)

*'I shall go and vote for service delivery. The councillor we have now is not delivering.'* (Phokeng)

*'The energy to vote is not there, but we are going to vote, because we have to vote. We are going to vote with the hope that one day your name will be seen and you might be lucky.'* (Nongoma)

### **Vote to defend the post-apartheid order, give government a chance, or keep the opposition government you have**

*'I shall vote to keep black supremacy.'* (Alexandra)

*'I shall vote for my party to remain at the top. Hopefully the next generation will benefit.'* (Phokeng)

*'20 years is a long time, but it is the first time we have had representative government. It is their first time running a country, trying to do it in a western way and all that jazz... so obviously they're going to suck at it.' 'One of the big motivations why I vote is to give our government a chance.'* (Cape Town)

*'The ANC is desperately trying to win power in the Western Cape. It is important to vote so that we keep what we like in the province.' 'I am going to vote because this is the last time I may be able to vote. The revolution is coming.'* (Belville)

*'We all know that government movements are slow, but they will eventually come to us. What is encouraging to me is that we have seen that there is help, even though it has not come to me [personally], but it is there. One day it will end up here and I shall be benefitting.'* (Nongoma)

A small number of participants argue their cases for not intending to vote in the local elections of 2016. Their motivations largely centered on non-delivery on promises. As this Ramatlabama group participant summarised: 'They promise us this and that, but never deliver. Voting is just a waste of time.' The sentiment was echoed in Ikageng: 'I won't vote. I don't think anything different will happen here in South Africa.'

## 4 Political participation beyond elections and use of political information

### 4.1 Introduction

Electoral participation is crucial to the democratic fibre of political systems, but it is not the only important form of political participation. Given that the youth's interest in elections in South Africa is known to be lower than that of other age groups,<sup>23</sup> it is of interest to ascertain this broad age category's interest in other forms of political engagement as well. In addition, it is argued in some research that better access to relevant information, and higher quality information would have facilitated higher levels of youth participation.<sup>24</sup> Access to information was consequently an adjunct factor to actual participation explored in this study of South African youth.

This study hence did not simply explore the South African youth's orientations towards electoral participation (registration and voting), but also investigated the youth's experiences of and feelings about a range of non-electoral modes of participation. The objective was to explore the whole repertoire of possible youth interest and participation. The previous section has already established that disinterest in or disengagement from elections does not signify 'no political interest' or 'no political consciousness.' Section 3 determined that the youth are interested in politics, and have often (albeit by far not always) registered for and voted in South Africa's election 2014. It also demonstrated through the exploration of awareness of and responses to public events that the youth take thorough note of political developments, albeit often those with entertainment value and controversy.

The analysis shows that the type of events that the youth in this study find most interesting are events that occurred subsequent to the elections. It appears that prevailing political interest at the time of the study could have been higher than at the time of the May 2014 elections. Contrary to this argument, however, the observations of the young people regarding politics and politicians in government and the ruling party, the ANC, in particular suggest that they have also been interested at high levels prior to the elections. Their observations had often resulted in disaffection and disappointment, which, equally, do not translate into being disinterested in politics.

This section reports on the youth's engagement with a wide range of political and social or community (with political implications) events in South Africa. The following modes of non-electoral political participation – including various contemporary and social media variations (summarised in the second row of Table 10) – were offered for discussion.

1. Contact my local councillor, MPL, or MP for information or to tell them to do certain things.
2. Go to the municipality or provincial government office to report a matter.
3. Volunteer for a campaign to get government to address an issue, or sign a petition.
4. Work with the community to do something that government had neglected.
5. Work with any on-line system to report faults and problems in the community.
6. Take part in a community protest, either on local conditions or big national issues.
7. Go on strike about issues at work.
8. Do community work, like helping collect clothes or food for people who suffer shortages.
9. Make a donation to a political organization, or pay membership fees.
10. Follow politicians' or public figures' tweets or Facebook postings politics matters.
11. Use social media news updates, or read /listen to / watch politics in the traditional media.

Section 4 also presents detailed reports from the focus group participants on the information they had received in the run-up to the 2014 elections. It probes the youth's assessments of the information and specifically whether they had desired more information than they had received. It equally accepts that the youth are not passive recipients, but that they might also have been active conduits to the further dissemination of information.

As a control measure on the theme of need for information, the discussions explored the topic of a question the

participants would ask one of their public representatives should the opportunity arise. Their responses, albeit in the post-election period, testify to the fact that they are well informed, up to date on issues, and that their questions are of a high order – interrogating effectiveness, efficiency, and ethics of public representatives (rather than seeking empowerment for information to help them understand politics). All indications are that they are interested and informed, and that their understandings are anchored in real life experiences of the iniquities of South Africa’s political system.

## 4.2 The range of the youth’s political engagement - in concrete action and information exchanges

The reports from the youth on their range of political engagements tell a story of ‘making ends meet.’ They do not have textbook, ideal forms of engagement, but they report on a range of what is possible to do and achieve in their circumstances. There is nothing passive or pitiful about their range of activities. When it comes to general politics and political processes they largely know how to get the information, and generally where to find it. These answers often related to modern media and especially the internet. Disempowerment and exasperation relate to the human element in information and representation. It is their representatives and the political parties that are the weakest links in the chain of democracy and engagement. For them it is a question of accountability, of knowing how much budget has been allocated, over what term, and exactly for which projects in their communities.

Table 10 presents an overview of the extent of relevance of the range of political activities, along with select illustrations.

	Contact MP, MPL, councillor	Go to provincial / municipal offices	Volunteer for campaign to get government to act	Work with community to substitute for government	On-line / telephonic report faults & problems	Take part in community protest	Go on strike re work issues	Do community charity work	Make donation to party / pay membership fees	Follow politicians’ / public figures’ tweets / Facebook	Get social media news updates / watch TV, radio
<b>Mabopane</b>	No re-sponse.	Yes, but they got no re-sponse.	No.	Tried.	No.	Protest-ed once for jobs.	-	-	Paid for community night guards.	A bit at election time.	Social media several.
<b>Alexandra</b>		Deliver memo.	-	-	Get individual attention	Believe it works best.	-	-	-	-	
<b>Leondale</b>	Several do this.	Several do this.	One has.	Yes, also mob justice		Have pro-tested.	Some have been involved.	For the church.	Some do, others say ‘never’.	They keenly do.	Definitely. Social media easier.
<b>Nongoma</b>	Tried phone councillor, MP.	Contacted mayor.	Filled potholes, clean-ups.	-	-	-	-	-	One did.	Generally like to follow, Facebook.	

	Contact MP, MPL, councillor	Go to provincial / municipal offices	Volunteer for campaign to get government to act	Work with community to substitute for government	On-line / telephonic report faults & problems	Take part in community protest	Go on strike re work issues	Do community charity work	Make donation to party / pay membership fees	Follow politicians' / public figures' tweets / Facebook	Get social media news updates / watch TV, radio
<b>Northdale</b>	Parents do often.	Parents gone to municipality.	Some signed anti-e-tolls.	Rural child food project, homeless children.	BBM, but not taken seriously.	-	-	Cancer project, anti-child abuse.	-	Occasionally. I followed Julius.	Listen but don't phone in.
<b>Umlazi</b>	Went re housing queries.	Went with rates queries.	-	Potholes, grass, paint school, sewers.	-	Several have protested.	-	-	One did.	-	Several keep informed.
<b>Ikageng</b>	Ward committee, councillor.	Lodged complaints.	They only do things involving money.	Cleaned dumping site & old age home.	Minor instances.	Only student marches.	-	Different forms, for Mandela Day.	Memberships.	Follow a few, e.g. Malema.	Updates, TV, radio.
<b>Phokeng</b>	For soccer match pre-election.	Compile report & handed over.	None.	They did campaigning.		They did several.	-	-	Yes.	They even Google these parties.	-
<b>Ramatlabama</b>	Tried councillor for help.	No	No	Not them, they know others who did.	No	Several did.	-	-	No	No	No
<b>Bongolethu</b>	MPs visited in campaign.	Six say yes.	Several say yes.	Four say yes, fixing drains, find criminals.	No avenue to do this.	Did not take part in the protest.	One did.	Four did.	Five pay annually.	Two are followers, or WhatsApp	All use media.
<b>Cape Town</b>	One has done it.	One did.	-	Work with church on such projects.	Yes, against racist incident.	Many do, regularly, e. g. via schools.	-	Through schools, churches.	Never	Occasionally follow on Twitter.	News, updates online, YouTube.
<b>Belville</b>	It does not work, they say.	Three had.	Five had.	Five had, incl. in NGO type formation.	Five had, but were frustrated.	-	None	All had.	One did.	Five do	All have engaged.

**Notes:** See Item 6 in the discussion guide, Appendix A. The responses in this table represent the essence of the discussions. "-" indicates either that the topic was not broached (moderators had the prerogative to skip select items), or that there was no response in the group despite the theme being introduced.

### 4.2.1 Engaging public representatives

The group discussions offer multiple and varied reports on communities' efforts to engage their public representatives. The reports related to glimpses of the important politicians at election times at best. At other times the burden of representation shifts disproportionately to the local councillor. Most of the issues on which these young people wish to engage concern local issues and community problems – matters that affect their daily lives. Job opportunities are also seen largely as arising at the local level. Municipal ward committees also feature as points of reference to get problems addressed. A few participants cited street committees as a point of reference. Others note ANC members who live on the street and then step in to facilitate help in cases of desperate need.

#### Glimpses of contact with public representatives

*'We organised a soccer tournament and asked the ANC for a sponsorship. We knew they would come running. And they came with all those T-shirts.'* (Phokeng)

*'Whenever there is a problem we go to our ward committee member of our street. Problems like leaking water pipes get addressed. Things are always sorted out.' 'We reported problems with our toilets but until today they are still promising that they will attend to them.' 'These things take time ... there are processes that need to be followed.' 'We contacted a regional task team that was doing a Lekgotla. After that we can see progress, even if it is not that big.'* (Ikageng)

*'We needed access to land, so we got a petition together and we took it to this government person ... he did not know what a petition was. He never came back to us. We still do not have land to do agricultural projects.' 'I asked the mayor to lend us the municipal grader to prepare land on for an agricultural project but he said he could not help...' 'The MP does pass by when he goes to the councillor, or when they come to give food parcels.'* (Nongoma)

*'They are all useless ... MPs, MPLs, government.'* (Bongoletu)

*'I work in an NGO grouping in the community, in a suburb. We listed complaints about vandalism, graffiti, street lights not working, a dirty park, corroding roads. We took our list to the local municipality – and two weeks later things were being sorted out.'* (Belville)

#### Municipal councillors as the ones who (mostly) cannot escape the community

*'We went to the councillor. We felt he needed to assist a family whose roof was blown off. Since today, they did nothing.' 'In Soshanguve they wanted the sports ground cleared. The councillor came for meeting after meeting, before the election. But they only cut the grass and after the elections we did not see him again.'* (Mabopane)

*'A group of us decided to make our local councillor aware that many of our youth are unemployed and need a recreational centre... We have not seen any progress. It's like our efforts fell on death [sic] ears.'* (Ramatlabama)

*'I went to different councillors about these houses that were to be demolished. I did not know what was happening. They promised people would come and see. Maybe it was those people who were elected who did not come.' 'It was only after interference of a social worker that the councillor made some effort. Before that, for a long time, there was nothing. It was only when the people at his level were talking that he stood up and did something.'* (Umlazi)

*'We know the ward councillor. If there is something wrong we call him up.'* (Northdale)

*'We had an eroded road, but the councillor never showed up. He does not care. He is just lazy.'* (Nongoma)

#### Municipal offices and legislatures as places to deposit issues; no response guaranteed

*'I drafted a report and contacted the director for local economic development, asked him for a report on youth development in the area.'* (Phokeng)

*'If you go as a group you can even deliver a memorandum.'* (Alexandra)

*'It is just a waste of time to lodge complaints. They do not get attended to.'* (Ikageng)

*'They've given us promises but things do not happen ... Now what are they going to do for old lonesome me if I send them a request?' (Belville)*

### **ANC grassroots actions – some positive experiences**

*'A grandmother down the street passes away. There was no money to bury her. On our street there was an ANC member. I went to him and he arranged the funeral, with food.' (Ikageng)*

*'At the time before the election there was a door-to-door action... MP's were present, and they wrote down the people's grievances.' (Bongolethu)*

The middle-class group of Indian participants (several just out of university, looking for work) was different in political activity from other groups. They related parents' political participation more than their own. They admitted that they 'are so busy with other things...' They did not feel their small actions would make a difference: 'It's going to be more of a waste of time to us.'

## **4.2.2 Direct action for results**

The youth in this study are no strangers to non-systemic participation and direct action in the form of protest. Several groups reported having been part of community protest action, either about physical living conditions or concerning work opportunities that had gone to persons who had been imported from other communities. A small number, from the ranks of the employed participants, also confirmed having participated in strike action – although this was not nearly as prevalent as protest to get jobs. It appears that politicians often promise jobs (including at the time of elections) and when jobs materialise the local community members will feel that those opportunities rightfully belong to the local job-seekers. The discussions were also frank about involvement in illegal (but effective, in the view of the participants) action.

### **Protest and looting work, as do mob justice**

*'Protest gets a lot of ideas to be heard at the highest level. Two months ago we had a complaint about people being employed to fix the streets and they were from places like Soweto and Tembisa. It messes things up because we burn tyres, but things get changed quickly.' 'Looting also works.' 'It is better to go as a group [when making representations to public representatives]. When you approach them alone you are not heard.' (Alexandra)*

*'There are service providers involved in electricity and therefore the tariffs are higher. So we're protesting against that.' (Leondale)*

*'We once had a protest because they issued jobs and said it was for ANC members only. So there was a huge fight.' (Mabopane)*

*'A week before the elections we closed the streets [euphemism for protest], demanding action, because it was not safe to cross the streets to the school. They came running, brought school patrollers, but only for a few weeks.' 'Now they are building speed bumps.' (Phokeng)*

*'When you see somebody stealing, or something happening to your neighbour you blow that whistle and we all come out with whatever we have.' 'And we deal with it, even before reporting it to the police ...' 'We sort him out.' (Leondale)*

## **4.2.3 Volunteer work and community charity**

The youth in this study quite commonly report involvement in small forms of community volunteer or charity work. They had not always interpreted these activities as forms of political engagement – even if the activities fill in the voids that had been left by ineffectual government action.

These volunteer actions are often offered as investment in getting real jobs, as was also noted in the Bongolethu and Nongoma groups. Young people hope to be seen to be helping, and thus be known to the power-holders and government employers. They argue that this would give them a better chance of getting employed once job opportunities become available.



### Community volunteer work

*'We have been cutting grass. We were promised if we do that after three months we would have jobs... Three months have come and gone, but no jobs.' 'Jobs come but it is people we do not know who are now working. We who have been doing the volunteer work are still not working.'* (Umlazi)

*'Citizens must also do their part, as in help the poor, stuff like that. You can't expect government to do everything.'* (Belville)

Some of the participants (for example, Bongoletu) also indicate that they were part of campaigning teams in the pre-election period of 2014.

### 4.2.4 Social media engagement – political 'repretainment'

In contemporary social media style, many of the young people in the study report on political activity that involves alternative forms of engagement with politicians and other public figures. These cases concern both issues of political representation and political entertainment ('repretainment'). They follow and comment on political leaders' social media postings. They become aware of many of the party political and leadership ideas and actions.

#### Follow political leaders' tweets or postings on Facebook

*'Yes, we do, on Helen Zille.' 'I follow Julius [Malema].' 'He's very entertaining.' '[Fikile] Mbalula is hilarious on Twitter.' 'Bantu Holomisa is very bold.' 'Thuli Madonsela is very inspirational.' 'Madonsela does not do Twitter wars.' 'I follow Barack Obama. Once he read my tweet and I was like f..., this is the most powerful guy in the world...'* (Leondale)

*'For me, Facebook is the best way, because you can immediately raise an issue that you would have seen, and they can respond immediately.'* (Nongoma)

### 4.2.5 Preferences for representation

Participants generally prefer direct, inter-personal contact – despite their modern lifestyles and better uptake of social media engagements. They argue that in this way they can exert more pressure, and have a better chance of holding the person to account. This is particularly useful when the person being contacted is known in the community. Then there is the mutual knowledge of what the demand was.

It is also significant that due to many of the participants being unemployed, and quite a number modestly self-employed, they have time to keep an eye on what their representatives do and what happened (or not) in their communities. Employment is often the focus of actions that they institute. It is in this context that they reckon that protest works. They have seen representatives and officials scramble to respond and bring reassurances when they commence protest.

Most of the groups report frequent or relatively frequent engagement on the social media. They have doubts, however, about the effectiveness of the social media. It might very well be, as argued in the Nongoma group, that someone else handles a Facebook or Twitter account on behalf of the politicians – and there is no guarantee that the complaint or appeal will get to the right person in good time. In many groups the fall-back position is the councillor as the kingpin of political representation, even if there are overwhelmingly dismal experiences of engagements with the councillors.

The social media are often seen more as entertainment than as serious political action. When it comes to hard news and essential information, most of the young people in this study still rely on the traditional media of television and radio. Some, however, recognize distinct advantages of the social media. These include that you can put the issue across directly and with evidence of what was presented, plus that it is *possible* to get immediate responses (as also discussed in the Nongoma group). They do *not* see Twitter as having these advantages, because on that forum profound issues might be reduced to simply one voice amongst many. Twitter is about people 'talking amongst themselves and the main person that you want to address your issue may end up not attending to your issue' (Nongoma).

### 4.3 Sources and assessments of political information received

In order to get a picture on the type of access that the youth has to political information, and how it varies across provinces and different demographics, the study asked a series of questions on what type of information the participants had received, or sent (in order to check on possible activism) in the period around the 2014 elections. Participants were asked about receiving or sending information on the political parties (or any party in particular), voter registration, and voting on Election Day. They were also asked whether they received the information on mobile technology, laptop or computer, telephone voice options (landline or mobile), radio or television, newspapers, or in the form of pamphlets, bill boards or posters (see item 7 in Appendix A).

The young people in these groups commonly have strong opinions of the media – traditional and especially of the manifestations of the social media – that bring them their information about politics and elections. It was possible therefore in the analysis summarised in Table 11 to use a rudimentary form of directional intensity scaling. It was done in qualitative-interpretative style, offering summative rankings for each of the media (source of information) involved. After briefly reviewing two agencies – the IEC and political parties (both major purveyors of political information to the youth) – the rest of section 4.3 reports on the youth's assessments of the information sources in Table 11. The discussion was designed to focus specifically on information that had been received at the time of the South African elections of 7 May 2014. This orientation provided a specific focal point ensuring, for example, that participants would talk about specifics and real experiences.

#### 4.3.1 Cool registration-voting information from the IEC

All of the groups reported having received voter registration and vote casting or Election Day information. Much of this information came from the IEC to their mobile phones. This was considered to have been 'cool'. It is especially on voter registration that 'coverage' appears to have been close to universal, as judged by the experiences of participants in the current series of focus groups.

The IEC voter registration detail and voter education communications were generally considered to have been useful and welcome – also in groups that were irritated by the political parties' approaches. Participants thought it was cool that they could send in their ID numbers and get information on where to go and vote, including on the details of the voting station: 'That was cool. I thought that was like the most useful thing,' was one of the Leondale observations.

There was no sense of apathy or disinterest due to not knowing how to do the essential voting activities. None of the discussions delivered evidence of the youth having lacked the basic information to register and to vote. Variations on this theme were also evident. The Mabopane group related that *had they been* more interested in the elections they would have been able to find more information: 'If we were interested we would have researched and asked people.'

#### 4.3.2 Communication from political parties – they should 'entertain us'

The Mabopane discussion demonstrated the extent to which the youth expect the political parties to entertain them, and bring them information in ways and at events that they enjoy. They mentioned that the ANC would have made more of an impact had they come to one of the local parks to stage an event. The billboards, this group argued, did not make the grade: 'When I walk and pass a billboard the minute I passed it its out [of my head].' The Leondale group confirmed this trend. They did get information, but 'I didn't want it!' Some of the Belville group participants, in contrast, reckon that 'you can never have enough information.' In the same group several voices emphasized that their busy lifestyles mean they do not have the time to sift through everything; thus, they get loads of information, but not in a usable form.

From group to group participants had similar reports on communications from political parties: much was received, but it was overwhelmingly about calls of 'vote for me,' a few self-praises, plus either a few promises (for example of jobs) or criticisms of the governing party thrown into the mix. As a general rule, these young South Africans were unimpressed. Participants in the Belville group reckon that the political parties need to be far more open in the

information they share with both their constituents and those whom they try to recruit. They also express a need to receive more 'positive' information, for example on projects that are being rolled out successfully.

The ANC and the DA were the two parties that most frequently featured in the communications that the participants received. Others also referred to EFF communications, or referred indirectly to the NFP and IFP (references to the last two parties were inferred from the context of select discussions, for example in Nongoma, Alexandra and Leondale). Participants across the groups referred to the fact that political parties tended to communicate in terms of direct and brief appeals to register, vote and vote for the specific party. They were far less likely to offer information (even extracts or core points) from their election manifestos. Participants with access to the internet report that they sometimes searched the internet to get manifesto information.

### **Views on the political parties' appeals**

*'The ANC just went "Vote for me! Vote for me!" "The ANC sms'ed lots of my friends and family, but not me. I think they knew!' (Cape Town)*

*'It was about why you should vote for them.' [DA and ANC in the case of this group] 'About what they will do.' 'What they stand for.' 'Maybe the Indian community is not the ANC's target market. So that's why we did not get ANC pamphlets.' (Northdale)*

*'The DA was praising themselves, talking about all the things they're going to do when they are voted in.' (Umlazi)*

*'But we want to hear more positive information from the political parties. If I could just hear how they helped with certain requests.' 'But they don't also tell the bad story. They focus on the good, but there is always the bad somewhere. So I think you must follow the information from numerous parties.' (Belville)*

*'I heard the ANC making announcements that they want to bring change in different sectors and that if we vote for them those changes will materialise.' (Ramatlabama)*

*'We received information to go and vote for the two-thirds majority.' [This was part of the ANC's campaign] 'The other one was to help bring down Zuma [remove the ANC].' (Phokeng)*

*'I kept getting SMS's from Helen Zille... I don't know how she got my number though.' 'Repeatedly.' 'But, like Helen Zille? It was weird.' 'Unfortunately I did not [receive such information].' 'I also got it.' 'And we got "Vote for the ANC"' (Leondale)*

The picture that emerged was one of a reasonably well informed youth, satisfied that they had sufficient information, especially about processes and to some extent also about the parties. In the words of the Umlazi group, 'the information we got was more than enough.' The youth are certainly cynical of the political parties – even if more supportive of some than of others. Whatever additional information they would have received from the parties would have been tested against their benchmarks for truthfulness and integrity, properties that they often find lacking in political parties.

Minority group participants (such as those in the Belville group) feel the parties should reach out to suburban people. They lament that politicians go to townships and rural areas routinely while suburban citizens hear about from the mass media about outreach towards these other communities.

**Table 11:**  
**Sources of political information – comparative evaluation of sources**

**Code:** +2 featured and liked strongly; +1 = featured and liked; 0= featured but no evaluation; -1 = featured and disliked; -2 = featured and disliked strongly. '-' means there were either reports of no usage, or silences when the moderator called out that medium.

	Television / TV	Radio	Newspapers	Pamphlets, manifestos, billboards	Bill boards, posters	Telephone (landline)	Internet / email	Sms via mobile	Twitter	Facebook	WhatsApp	Mxit	BBM	YouTube / Instagram	Door-to-door in person, by ward committees	Drive-around broadcast
Mabopane	0	0	-	-	0	-	-	0		+1	+1	-	-	-	-	-
Alexandra	0	0	0	0	0		-	0	+1	+1	+2	-1	-	+2		0
Leondale	0	0	0		0	-2	-2	-1	+2	+2	+1	-2	0	+1	0	-
Nongoma	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	0	+1	+2	0	+1	0	-	+1	-
Northdale	0	0		0	-	-	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0
Umlazi	+2	+2	+1	-	+1	-	-	-1	-	-	-	-	-	-	+1	+1
Ikageng	0	0	-	+1	-	-	-	+1		+2	+1	-	-	-	+1	-
Phokeng	0	0	-	-	0	-	-	+2	0	+1	+2	0	0	-	0	+1
Ramatlabama	0	0	0	+1	+1	-	-	+1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bongolethu	0	0	0	0	-	-	0	0	-1	+2	+2	-2	-1	+1	-	-
Cape Town	-1	-	-	-	-	-2	-	-	+/-1	+2	+2	-2	-	+1	-2	-
Belville	0	0	+2	-	0	0	+1	+2	-	+1	-	-	-	-	0	-

**Note:** See item 7 in the discussion guide, Appendix A.

### 4.3.3 General assessments of the media used in political communication

The discussions offered evidence of substantial (by the criteria of the participants) amounts of political information that had been received about elections, voting, and party politics at the time of South Africa's Election 2014. The information came to the youth via a wide range of media, both conventional-traditional and the new or social media. The youth in this study were forthcoming in offering their assessments of the media used to bring them their information, or the media that they themselves prefer to employ. The predominant theme of this section is the channelling or media used to convey information. However, the media inevitably also blend with assessments of the messages that were provided. This mix is also reflected in the media assessments below.

The following quotations offer the youth's reflections on traditional media of radio, posters, billboards, in-person campaigning through community visits, and door-to-door (see specific quotations), and social media in the form of Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, as well as sms (see specific quotations) and email.

### Positives about political information received – range of media

*'We listen to the **radio** because we want to know what is happening in the world.' 'The [bill] **boards** and the **posters** show the person and you can see that is the type of person they are talking about. You then make your choice based on what you have seen and heard.' 'It is important for voter education to be able to hear and see what you are supposed to do.' 'It will be better to get information on **mobile**. The **billboards** and **posters** never get removed once the elections are done.' 'But some people do not have **cell phones**... They might still have to rely on **billboards**.' 'Radio and TV would be best.' (Umlazi)*

*'Newspaper is the best. That is what everybody follows during elections.' 'Basically, just **social media** for me...' 'It works to follow the politicians on **social media**.' 'It would be great if politicians could come around once a month to tell us what is going on...' (Belville)*

*'The **direct letters** with voter and voting information were good. It couldn't get lost due to network problems.' (Ramatlabama)*

*'Facebook is the best. You can open a page with 1,000 friends and all will be able to follow, so nowadays everyone has **Facebook**.' 'I disagree, not all of us are educated. With **SMS's** they are able to reach all of us, as some of the phones do not have **Facebook** and **Twitter**.' 'I think **meeting directly** is the best. Some youth do not have phones.' 'Door-to-door is the best. Political leaders are usually part of door-to-door.' 'The EFF is so popular in Rustenburg because Malema was regularly **campaigning** in Rustenburg. It makes people feel they are taken seriously, even if it is only for the election period.' (Ikageng)*

*'We were sending **Twitter** messages. There was a whole dialogue.' 'There was a lot of mud-slinging.' 'The problem with **SMS** is that it is so invasive... It comes directly to you, they know your number.' 'But because of the beeper you won't miss a **SMS**.' 'I don't like **phone calls**. It is too personal.' 'Phone calls! Oh my God!' 'They're like persistent, hey? "What time should I call you back? Can I call you back at ...?"' 'Emails are easy to delete!' (Leondale)*

*'WhatsApp was the best for social communication.' 'WhatsApp gets cheaper and cheaper.' 'Twitter is a social network for the whole world. On WhatsApp you need to have the numbers.' (Alexandra)*

*'Posters are the easiest way to get information across.' 'No, I see a **poster**, with slogans, but it has no impact on me.' (Ramatlabama)*

*'I am a biker. So the ANC gave us R1,500 per bike to go around Rustenburg with a **loudspeaker** informing people that they must go out and vote.' (Phokeng)*

There is a substantial gap between the youth using social media generally and using it for politics and political information. Usage is high, but not necessarily to send electoral and political information.

### Variable feelings about getting political information by mobile

*'We use the social media more for communication purposes. There is awareness out there on the social media. But political use is not that evident.' 'There is some politics but not on everyday basis.' 'No-one makes the extra effort to get the political information.' 'It is not on our platforms. If you really need to know then you go and find out.' (Northdale)*

*'I will be fine if they send messages on our phones [to] tell us what is happening.' (Umlazi)*

*'An sms is simple, quick, and there is no clutter. I'll probably read it when it arrives.' (Belville)*

### Advantages of door-to-door

*'The advantage is that you can persuade people if they had not been interested in the political party you represent.' 'The information will go to waste if people are not used to social media. In direct contact you know where you stand. And on social networks people do not behave in the same way as they do when you speak to them face-to-face.' (Nongoma)*

*'It will be great is representatives come and tell us what is going on once a month!' (Belville)*

#### 4.3.4 Social media preferences for receiving political information

The preceding section offered a series of youth assessments of social media, side-by-side with opinions on traditional media and specific party political usages. Against that background of comparative views on the new versus traditional media, this section surveys briefly a selection of opinions specifically on the youth's experiences of and preferences for social media.

Participants have strong opinions on their social media and how well they serve the function of receiving political information.

When it comes to sharing information, especially amongst friends or in some designate groups, these young people reckon WhatsApp is great. They are also very keen on Facebook. They enthuse about its persuasive power, the possibility to speak to 'hundreds' at the same time, and the fact that they can access it in great convenience. Many are on Twitter, but they also see it as going out of fashion, a sentiment that was particularly strong in the Cape Town group. The Bongolethu group felt exactly this same way about BBM. Mxit is not very popular with these youth participants. Besides reckoning that it is also largely out of fashion, they feel it is more 'the kids' who are into Mxit nowadays. They talk about the fact the at election time the political parties sent out information on Mxit. The participants furthermore remark on the effectiveness of SMS communication. SMS messages tend not to get lost in clutter. The participants are confident that if they send an SMS message it will be read.

##### WhatsApp

*'Yes!' (Bongolethu), 'It's not really for information.' 'It is more for friends.' 'It is quick.' (Cape Town)*  
*'WhatsApp is good for sharing information amongst ourselves.' (Ikageng)*

##### Facebook

*'Yes!' (Bongolethu)*

*'On Facebook you communicate until your minds are the same. It works for me.' 'You can talk to hundreds of people on Twitter and Facebook, far more effective than face-to-face.' (Nongoma)*

*'... Our preferred way to get information, both on mobile and laptop.' (Cape Town)*

*'On Facebook it's always on your timeline. You can read it when you have the time.' (Belville)*

##### SMS

*'You know that person is reading that message.' (Cape Town)*

*'It does not disappear amongst clutter.' (Belville)*

##### Twitter

*'Out of fashion...' 'It's outdated.' (Cape Town)*

##### BBM

*'It is outdated.' (Bongolethu)*

##### Mxit

*'It is no longer used much, but when you opened it [at the time of elections] you were bombarded with information about the elections.' (Nongoma).*

*'It's an outdated one.' 'I think the kids still use it.' 'Kids are even on WhatsApp.' (Leondale)*

##### Internet

*'It is just a question of getting into the computer labs.' 'Not all people are computer literate.' (Bongolethu)*

#### 4.3.5 Political information sent

Participants without exception received far more information than they sent out. (Given that this study was about youth or citizens in general and not about activists this is to be expected.) This was confirmed in the Phokeng

group: 'Mostly we were receiving information and not sending it.' A few noted that they passed on interesting snippets, mostly to friends. In these instances (such as for the Cape Town group) it was more about entertainment value than in the line of political education. Some talked about passing party political messages to friends simply to annoy them: 'I forward the messages received from political parties just to p... people off,' said a participant in Cape Town. An Alexandra participant sent information on to a friend when the SMS's promised RDP houses and sponsorship of school fees... 'So we voted.'

One Cape Town participant shared with his group that he was part of an anti-voting campaign called SOS. 'It was a campaign about "Don't vote". We argued that we have power. If we don't vote then they will listen.' In several other groups participants talked about having been party to door-to-door campaigns to write down the grievances of the voters (Bongolethu was one such example). A Nongoma participant told others of having been a party agent, and reckons that was the reason she 'was seen' – meaning she was recognized and received information from a political party. She reported that normal citizens do not get this 'recognition.' Several in this group had also been involved in door-to-door campaigning. The Ikageng group also related door-to-door campaign involvement.

#### 4.3.6 Discrepancy between pre- and post-election communications

Even if just a short time had transpired between the May 2014 elections and the project's fieldwork, participants related the discrepancies between both political parties' and the IEC's pre- and post-election communications. The Bongolethu group was one group in which this phenomenon was discussed. Both political parties and the IEC, participants argued, were extremely keen to communicate prior to the election. However, neither the IEC nor the political parties bothered to even share the election results with them.

For results information, most participants relied on television and radio. They recognized that they could access such information on the internet. For example, a Cape Town participant noted: 'I looked up manifestos and stuff; I did not receive it from anyone in particular.' However, they would like to see the pre-election fervour matched by what amounts to proven respect for them as citizens. They do not want to be treated as voting fodder.

### 4.4 Issues the youth want to see addressed in political communication

The burning issues for the youth in this study are first and foremost education and employment, often referred to in terms of 'job opportunities.' These are the issues that affect their lives and are the topics on which they want to be courted for political engagement. (Even when they are employed, jobs are the priority issue for these young people who recognize the far-reaching impact of high unemployment rates on society and economy in general.) Politics for South Africa's young people is the lives they live – it is not a compartment for political games. The youth are not looking for political small-talk. Elections and daily politics have to center on the issues of their lives. It is on these issues that they want to hear from government, political parties, and anyone else who wants to speak about politics.

After education and employment, and in close pursuit, follow the range of services that demarcate the lives of frequently unemployed and largely poor South Africans. Housing is a predominant issue. Also prevalent is the general need for government to take care of its people. In section 4.4.1 (questions to public representatives) many of the participants extend this issue and wonder how the ANC would truly answer to the question.

#### **The problem of unemployment, of youth limited to 'silly jobs'**

*'The problem in South Africa is the high rate of unemployment.'* (Bongolethu)

*'Job opportunities should be given on merit, and not based on where you come from, or the colour of your skin.' Youth are not working; they are doing these silly jobs like selling things to motorists when the jobs are held by the older men.'* (Nongoma)

*'Number one is job opportunities. What is the point of education if there are no jobs?'* (Mabopane)

*'Unemployment should be at the top of the agenda.'* (Phokeng)

#### 4.4.1 Respect the youth

The youth in this study show that they are sophisticated, generally well informed, and are certainly not easily deceived. In most respects there is little difference between the issues that concern them and those that are national priorities. They note the basic things that are wrong in South Africa – like unemployment and quality educational opportunities. They see exactly how these problems interface with high crime rates and they talk in angry voices about how government specifically and many politicians generally insult the political intelligence of the youth. They also see how corruption and lack of accountability have an impact on delivery and they observe politicians of note looking far better after their own party and own communities within their own party than after citizens in general. They also see the extravagance in government and wonder, for example, how many hungry households could be fed using the event budget for one big government occasion, like a development summit (for example in the Northdale group), or for improvement of a specific community of young people.

##### Treat the youth with respect

*'I would advise government or that particular person at the top to not look at youth as if they do not have brains, because we see things and we know things... They should come to the people nicely and everyone will contribute. Do not treat people like children. Treat young people like they are Cyril Ramaphosa.' 'They must stop bringing end products to the youth, like the EPWP. They should come and talk and not impose.' 'I would not give any advice, because they treat us as useless.' 'They should consider the youth always and not just during elections.' 'I want [to engage] them on youth development so that the youth in turn can play a role in developing their country.' 'They must stop side-lining the youth because they are traumatising and stressing the youth.' (Ikageng)*

*'Youth are not taken care of. They are not noted. That is why crime is such an everyday thing. Look at gender and age when you employ people. We are what we are because we are not noticed, we are marginalised.' (Nongoma)*

*'When we speak to them, the elders, the people in cabinet, they claim we are too young to know much about politics and the issues the community at large faces...' (Ramatlabama)*

#### 4.4.2 Government needs to do more on the jobs front

The youth in this study are convinced that government does not have its act together when it comes to job creation. They reckon there should be better reflection, more work and further research. Education is intricately linked to unemployment, also in the arguments of these young people. They question, on the one hand, the high levels of attention to education if there cannot be matching uptake through job opportunities. On the other hand, they wonder about the appropriateness of the education and training that are on offer.

##### Imploring government to do more and better

*'Discuss the issue of jobs, especially amongst the youth.' 'I would also like them to speak about jobs.' 'Discuss education and job security.' (Ramatlabama)*

*'Do more research on what the youth want and focus on the things that the youth want, like jobs.' 'Train the youth with skills so that we can do beneficiation here.' (Ikageng)*

*'They must talk about the people who are not working, the disabled, the blind, and offer them something to keep them busy.' 'The key of all of this we are talking about is for a person to have a job – if you don't work you don't have anything at home, or in life.' 'Of all the things we talk about being employed is what it is all about.' 'Government should organise better to counter unemployment.' 'There is only one thing I shall say and that is that we are in need of jobs.' (Umlazi)*

*'Are we ever going to get a solution to the issues of the youth or is there going to be more research that finds out that the youth is complaining about this and that? Is anything actually going to happen?' (Nongoma)*

*'Obviously, [they must talk about] job creation. And they must talk about what they have done, besides what their plans are.' (Belville)*



### 4.4.3 Corruption and nepotism blocking youth employment

These youth voices identify direct links between job opportunities for the young and corruption in government. It might be argued that it is not the government's job to provide jobs for all; also, that South Africans tend towards entitlement and deferring responsibility to their government. However, young people observe that it is corruption and nepotism – known and widespread practices in government – that deprive them of jobs. Hence, it follows that it is government's responsibility to provide them with jobs. The Mabopane group stresses: 'I would advise them to bring better education and job opportunities, because today there is a lot of corruption. You only get a job if they know you. If you don't know anybody you won't get a job.' Others talk about public funds and taxes generally and the need to ensure that citizens and the poor specifically reap the benefits, 'so that our taxes don't end up in someone's house, to improve the fire pool' (Belville group).

### 4.4.4 Youth suggestions on things government ought to talk to them about

Conversations easily veer towards the things that are amiss in the lives of the youth in South Africa, courtesy of insufficient government action. These are the topics on which the youth wish to get more information – and inevitably improved accountability – from government. The following list of things for government to do followed on prompts for the youth to advise government on 'things to come and talk to the youth about'.

Some, like the Belville group, want government to step up, reach out and give hope to young people across South Africa. The list of proposals on education was particularly long. Many of the educational proposals and requests also interface with the issues of crime and jobs. Further details on these exact issues (and how they affect the young people's lives) were reported in section 2. Section 4.5 also elaborates on some of the issues when the report focuses on questions the youth would like to ask public representatives, should they suddenly have such an opportunity. This listing was top-of-mind, without prompting the discussions in any direction. Together with the next section the exercise therefore indicates the priorities in young people's lives. The words in the following listings are mostly abbreviated quotations or summaries of the conversation sentiments, and are therefore not placed in quotation marks:

#### Education and jobs:

*Offer the youth social grants, something that will enable me to get a house, the 'points requirement' for bursaries must be lower, simplify the way educational information is provided, remove age restrictions on learnerships, promote education and extracurricular activities, change correctional services to rehabilitation (Alexandra); schools are too far apart – children are being killed and kidnapped (Mabopane); discussions about educational opportunities need to be diversified (Phokeng); youth need access to colleges and technikons closer to home, educational institutions need to collaborate to ensure that youth are not excluded, government needs to build more community libraries (Ramatlabama); offer free education at the universities, education generally needs to be free, government must open up opportunities for those of us without matric – we cannot even register for jobs and we are lagging behind (Umlazi); encourage the youth better to educate themselves, look at the insufficient finances available to the youth, we cannot register because that costs money, better education will help decrease the crime rate, have a place in all municipalities where young people can be helped with counselling, information, finance applications, government should bring these things to the rural areas as well, tell us what government is doing to ensure that all these people who go and learn [for degrees] get in-service training and jobs when they finish (Nongoma); you need investment in education in order to foster job creation (Belville).*

#### Crime, drugs and teenage pregnancy:

*'Nyaope' [a drug] is killing our brothers... it is because they don't have job opportunities to build something for themselves' (Mabopane); educate the youth more about drug abuse (Ikageng); tell us what they are going to do to reduce crime and the abuse of drugs (Nongoma); do something about teenage pregnancy (Phokeng); educate the youth about teenage pregnancy (Ikageng).*

#### Services by government:

*RDPs [RDP houses] to be received by over-40s as well (Alexandra); government must find ways to*

*help take care of those who cannot look after themselves (Ramatlabama); remove the e-toll system – it is countering economic growth (Ikageng).*

**Foreigners:**

*Look at the issue that foreigners are killing our economy by producing fake things, foreigners are killing us by selling things cheaply (Ikageng); the president is allowing the foreigners to come and take our jobs (Umlazi); ensure that foreigners do not take our jobs, foreigners accept the lowest pay and increase value when they exchange to go back to their countries (Nongoma).*

**Crime:**

*Talk to us about how to prevent crime and assist the youth to get jobs (Phokeng); address security – one cannot live a life of employing security guards outside one's home and requiring bullet-proof windows (Northdale); safety is a big thing for us (Belville).*

**Government integrity, ability and accountability:**

*Government needs to be honest, remove the dead wood from government, government needs to be proactive on things that concern the youth, people at the top there are not doing anything – they need to move, we want new blood in government (Phokeng); government should have people who look at how money is being spent... communities should know how much money is being allocated to them, there should be no shoddiness and surprises – people who don't deserve should not get (Umlazi); there is hard evidence of government corruption but still they try to pass it off, corruption is eating into the available money (Northdale); it would be so nice for our government to be accountable (Belville).*

## 4.5 Youth's questions to political representatives

As a measure to assess the need for information, to corroborate political issues that interest young people, and to find indications as to what type of information might be offered by a social media platform, the focus group participants had the chance to voice questions they would like to pose to their MP, MPL, or councillor. The moderator role-played, introducing him- or herself as 'Your representative.' This helped bridge the doubt that participants had as to whether it is realistic to expect their representative to be available to take questions. (Even so, one Belville participant remarked: 'I don't know if I can believe the question.')

The participants were encouraged to focus on questions that are important for young people.

Cynicism nevertheless prevailed. The young people role-played despite hardly ever getting to see their elected representatives beyond the occasional sighting of the local councillor. Government in their experiences is notorious for making promises, but falling short on actions. A quotation from the Ikageng group illustrates the orientation: 'For how long have we been crying for jobs? Till now, what have you seen happening?' Equally revealing is that the same group then also defended government's promise of '200,000 jobs.' 'It does not mean that we will now all work. It happens bit by bit; your turn will come.'

The youth offered a range of questions. The questions frequently pertained to services, unemployment, and conditions that the youth suffer in South Africa. They put forward basic questions about government plans and actions on the issues of poverty, crime, the justice system, death penalty, or the 'Secrecy Bill,' but their concerns center overwhelmingly on corruption and accountability. Many other questions (and brief elaborations that they offered) concerned things they wonder and worry about concerning their representatives, leaders of particular political parties, and the president of South Africa himself.

### QUESTIONS FOR THE POLITICIANS

**President Zuma – personal-political issues**

*'We shall ask the president: "Where are the jobs?"' 'I would ask the leader whether he is the leader for all the people, or just for a certain group or party.' 'Why is he doing different things for different people, and not one thing for all the people who are under his leadership. ANC card-carrying members get this and others get that.'* (Umlazi)

*'[Mr President] what are you bringing this time around that you did not do in your first term?' 'Zuma must go around to the communities and look at their conditions. Even when [the president] is reading we can't understand him; we can't wait for him to finish.' 'Everything President Zuma speaks is being written for him; he has never addressed us on his own.' 'Thuli Madonsela, what is happening to the investigation?' (Mabopane)*

*'When will Mr Zuma pay back the money?' (Ramatlabama)*

*'Well, the [Nkandla] money ... What is going to happen? Sort the money out and let us know what is happening.' (Belville)*

*'What guarantees do I have that the president will make true on his election promises?' 'In the past you never delivered on your promises – how must I trust you again?' 'I would ask Zuma when he will be stepping down. I do not have a problem with the ANC; I have a problem with the president.' (Phokeng)*

*'Mr President, how exactly are you helping the youth that have matric? How are your job creation plans working to help us here and now, us in this village who have to live?' (Nongoma)*

### **Commander-in-chief Malema – motivations and aspirations**

*'Mr Malema, did you really start a party to help the people or was it because you feel bad due to being "dissed" by the ANC? If the ANC were to ask you to come back, will you go back? Do you still have a love for the ANC?' (Nongoma)*

*'I would ask Malema what is he bringing that Zuma is not doing.' (Mabopane)*

*'I would ask Julius Malema if he knows the difference between communism and capitalism, as he seems to confuse the two. He also seems to confuse youth leader and leader of the country. He campaigned for president of the country, but now he is behaving like a youth leader.' (Phokeng)*

*'If you want Zuma to pay back the money, what are you going to do with it? How is it going to help the people?' (Ramatlabama)*

*'What will these [pay-back] funds really be used for?' (Northdale)*

### **Zille's racial plans**

*'Given a chance, won't you turn against the black people who voted for you? ... Because now she is wearing a black skin.' (Phokeng)*

*'I would ask Helen Zille, if she were to lead the country, what are the good and the new things she is going to bring about, as a white person for the black people, as a white person who has never liked a black person?' (Umlazi)*

## **POLITICAL PARTIES**

### **Ethics, edge over other parties**

*'Why has the ANC people neglected the people and enriched themselves?' 'Why has the ANC not delivered on the promises it stipulated a while ago?' 'Why have the ANC [leaders] enriched themselves to be tycoons while they allow the people to starve?' (Ramatlabama)*

*'Don't tell us the wrong-doings of the other parties, what is it that you can do?' (Northdale)*

*'What are you going to do to prevent corruption?' (Belville)*

*'Tell us what you are doing ... and what the other parties are not doing!' 'Give us a story with a picture. We don't like reading too much. We can then decide which one we want to watch.' (Cape Town)*

## GOVERNMENT

### Accountability, implementation, timeframes

*'When is the president going to call the municipalities to order? [This is] where you find budgets allocated but nothing is being done.' 'When are youth policies going to be effected in the value chain of provincial and local government?' 'How will the president guide the premiers?' (Phokeng)*

*'To all of the parties... the plans you have in place: how do you plan to make those plans become real, to get implementation?' 'How do you implement your promises?' 'It's easy to say I shall create a thousand or a million jobs, but how are you going to do that?' 'Also, give us a timeframe... tell us how many years before we can expect X, Y and Z.' (Northdale)*

*'Why has the ANC not kept its word? We are still struggling with service delivery. People are struggling and dying under your watch!' 'Our roads are bad; where are the houses you promised us? Eish, everything is not going according to plan. Why have you not set out to deliver what you promised?' 'We are waiting with bated breath.' 'I would ask the ANC... It seems as if Zuma has a lot of money, splurging it on Nkandla, yet the people of South Africa are struggling. That money could be used to help the youth empower themselves through education and employment.' (Ramatlabama)*

*'We want to hear: exactly where is the money coming from and where is it going to. We want verification that the money actually went to the people.' 'I'm so tired of their lies.' (Cape Town)*

*'What the politicians can do is to stop hiding information from us.' (Nongoma)*

*'Budget allocations get moved around. For example the money allocated to the EPWP suddenly goes to do something else where there is a shortage.' 'Talk about implementation first... even before you talk to us about this or that youth policy.' 'In their plans they must have a timeline... then, in three years, for example, we know to do something if there is still nothing.' (Bongolethu)*

Given this range of questions, issues arise as to the youth's belief in the ability (or inability) of their political leaders and government leaders in particular to perform and deliver. A revealing batch of opinions arose. Many simply do not believe that the ability is there. Others note ability but the accompanying unwillingness to work and serve the people. The youth note laziness, attitude, arrogance, and nepotism.

## ABILITY AND WILLINGNESS TO WORK AND SERVE

### Able and they learn as they go along, with help; some good work

*'Some of them have the skills.' 'There are some people who are just born with those abilities ...' 'They learn on the job.' 'They help one another.' (Nongoma)*

*'The mayor works very hard, but the councillors are not.' 'There is a lot of development in all aspects of sport...' 'The public hospitals are now offering services that one used to find only in private hospitals.' 'There are certain dead woods in leadership.' (Phokeng)*

*'The people in social development are working hard. They are unlike the police whom you see relaxed most of the time.' (Umlazi)*

### Laziness, attitude, puppets, they stop caring

*'They have the ability. It is just that they choose not to do things.' 'They're lazy.' 'It is their attitude.' 'I was telling our councillor it is her job to call meetings, but she doesn't. She just favours her own voting district.' 'It is in her interest to be active there.' 'The mayor came down himself to talk to us when he realised the councillor was not doing her work.' (Leondale)*

*'It seems they don't have the ability. Things are just the same, people are crying for houses.' 'They have been on these chairs for too long. They must bring in a young person to lead the youth, someone who understands young people's minds.' 'These people are like puppets. They are not in charge. They are being told, and change is not happening.' (Phokeng)*

*'These people! Once they have positions and have signed their contracts, they don't care much*

*about the wellbeing of the people. Then they are concerned about their own lifestyles and comfort. Once that is achieved, maybe they will do something...' 'They leave here knowing our problems, like we need roads and infrastructure. But when they get to the top positions they don't remember our cries. It's useless, really.' 'Perhaps they are overwhelmed with multiple tasks. But once they get their hands on something they are most likely to accomplish it.' 'I think they are overwhelmed and do not get to the point of addressing the people's concerns. They only look out for themselves.'* (Ramatlabama)

**Inappropriately qualified**

*'I do not think they have the ability... a person who has never done police work is appointed... There is no school to train the councillors in what they need to do.' 'The one becomes a councillor because there were meetings where he had made a lot of comments.'* (Umlazi)

## 5

## A 'democracy app' to help strengthen democracy in South Africa – offering a platform to the youth

### 5.1 Introduction - objectives of an app for youth and democracy

Social media are an integral part of the lives of most of the youth of South Africa. They use social media abundantly, albeit largely for social and personal communications. It is also a conduit for political information being sent to the youth – and occasionally they might also send out either political information or socio-political information that affect lives in their circles. At the time of South Africa's election 2014, they often received information from either the electoral authorities or from political parties. The reports in section 4 indicate that these young people largely welcomed the information from the IEC, concerning registration and voting details. They were far more cynical of the information from the political parties. They generally question the political parties and the elected public representatives' sincerity and effectiveness also in communicating with the youth.

The youth's queries and objections are anchored in widely shared experiences and perceptions of the public representatives. These young people also see evidence of how their representatives become scarce and selfish, looking after their own interests as primary concern. While the young people in these focus groups recognize that the youth have been beneficiaries of post-apartheid changes and delivery, much is lacking. They fail to get the breaks to take them into employment (or decent employment). They frequently remain poor. Improved access to education does not open the doors to much more than 'funny jobs.' Many still struggle to access education that will help qualify them for employment. They do not get much in the way of social grants. They are, in short, in need of improved contact with their representatives, now elected, who at the time of the 2014 election campaign had promised them 'heaven and earth' in exchange for their votes.

The young people in this study hence reacted largely with great anticipation when the possibility of an app<sup>25</sup> that could put them in touch with these representatives was introduced into the discussions. The optimists and cynics equally, however, recognize that such an innovation would depend on uptake by the politicians. Without mutual participation it would die young, or follow the dead-end street on which government call-lines to report problems (and enhance democracy) had ended. It nevertheless has potential, even if it is a no quick-solution and panacea to broader issues of shallow democracy.

The rest of this final section explores the possible advantages these young people observe for an app of this nature, especially given the need for transparency and accountability in government. It notes the pitfalls that these young but seasoned political observers put on the table. To conclude, the section extracts a set of desirable app features from the discussions.

### 5.2 Youth support for a democracy app

The youth in this study commonly welcome the idea of an app that would help get them information on pressing issues, and especially help establish an interface with their otherwise frequently absentee (elected) representatives. They reckon too that South African democracy generally would benefit from a democracy app – as long as it is not a toy telephone. For success it would have to get two-way communication between communities and their representatives instituted and institutionalised. It would also need to include targeted and empowering information on the issues that will feature in the process of democratic representation, as noted in the Belville discussion.

#### 5.2.1 An app facilitating two-way communication

There are high hopes that a democracy tool such as the proposed app could help fill the broken communication interfaces and bring two-way communication between the youth and their elected representatives. There is simultaneous recognition (section 5.3) that the representatives would have to become *interested and willing to*

*participate* before an app of this nature can have success.

The young people also hold out the hope that a democracy app will enable them as citizens to reach more of their representatives, regularly and with greater ease. Across educational levels and geographical and cultural boundaries this study showed that at present amongst the representatives it is largely the local councillor who can be accessed for representation of community needs. Yet, these councillors are often as uninterested as the rest of the representatives or are simply the wrong people to deal with issues. Participants hope that an app will open doors to more of the public representatives – up to the level of the president.

There is also a widespread belief that representatives simply do not always have the knowledge of the dire conditions of their constituents. Hence, as the argument goes, an app will empower the representatives to take better care of citizens once they learn via the app about the dire situations of these young citizens. It is expected to help the representatives understand the high levels of dissatisfaction and resentment – knowledge the youth widely believe their representatives lack.

### **Hope to get contact, responsiveness and two-way communication**

*'Such an app will be good. It will help us reach many individuals.' 'The product would make President Zuma feel the pressure, instead of messages just going to the local councillor.' 'Messages will reach targeted people. It will go straight to them.' 'It will help us know our steps in trying to get contact, responses. At least you could know where to go to from there.'* (Ikageng)

*'You will be able to meet these politicians!'* (Nongoma)

*'It is definitely a step in the right direction to put time, effort and money into getting politicians to communicate with average Joe in South Africa.' 'It will be a good idea if there will be someone who actually answers on the other side – and is capable of answering your question.' 'There must be a competent and capable person answering.'* (Belville)

### **Political parties will know where their followers stand, and become aware of the problems and complaints**

*'It is a good idea to have a platform where we can go and complain.'* (Nongoma)

*'I obviously would use it to query things. It will be a great thing.' 'It will be good for queries and information.' 'We shall be able to get information and lodge complaints faster.' 'An app will help be a reminder to the government people on what to do.'* (Mabopane)

*'There must be a page to put in complaints.'* (Alexandra)

*'When the ANC leaders are sitting at headquarters they will be able to see that this is how the majority of people are feeling. I believe if they do that they will push the country a step further from where we are now.'* (Mabopane)

*'If there can be protocols to the procedures on what we want done asap, then they can inform us as to why that cannot be done immediately. Then we can monitor progress.' 'It is obvious that you cannot send a message today and expect service within four days. You might send the message they will read it and you will only get the service a couple of months later.' 'Yes, you will find that you have sent a message over and over again, but behind the scenes something will be brewing.' 'I think it will work. Perhaps if you write to them continuously they will see the urgency of your request and attend to the matter.'* (Ramatlabama)

## **5.2.2 A democracy app as carrier for accountability and transparency**

The youth hope that a democracy app would bring accountability by their representatives. They hope updates can be posted so that they can have the details of what has been done at their fingertips. Such updates might concern, for example, housing delivery. Many of the participants comment that they hope for transparency. As things stand the representatives disappear behind a curtain of silence and obfuscation while their constituents are uninformed about budgets, specific delivery targets and the associated timelines. These young people understand that the

result is that representatives get away with doing nothing – and their constituents can do virtually nothing about it.

The young people in this study believe they would be empowered through the information that a focused App could leverage. They would be doing their mini-research on the app, and be less reliant on newspaper or television. 'A mobile app is the way to reach the youth,' remarked the Mabopane group.

### **The dream of accountability**

*'It will be an advantage if we can hold them accountable through the app. If they say in four months we can build 50 houses and after seven months there were only three then we can say: "Ahh, what happened?"' 'If it's an app telling us what they are currently doing, that will be fine, not what they're going to do in future.' 'They can bring us monthly updates, for example on how many houses have been built in that month.'* (Cape Town)

*'If they can be able to respond to complaints, then it will work.' 'It must be a call centre of sorts. And responses must be made immediately.'* (Phokeng)

*'It will be useful; it will help us get the representatives to actually do their work.' 'But they must be able to respond as well.' 'If [the politicians] know they are doing something good they can also get motivated.' 'At least then there will be nowhere to hide. Everybody can see you are doing well or poorly.' 'For now, people working in government are the ones that know the progress, unlike people out there who lack the information of the progress happening.'* (Leondale)

*'They can use it to show us the physical evidence of what they have done, in a specific time.'* (Cape Town)

The Mabopane group also remarked that an app would help create a public record of concerns that the citizens are raising. 'It will be good to have a public trail of the questions we have asked,' they argued.

## **5.3 Doubts about an app's ability to get representatives and parties into line**

Not all groups were overly enthusiastic about the prospects of a democracy app with the ability to convert politicians into exemplary people's representatives. They were often skeptical about an app's ability to bring better communication with their political parties, leaders and politicians in general. The Cape Town group, for example, simply responded 'No' when asked whether they would like access to such an app. The Belville participants shed light on this orientation, explaining that government should first get the basics right, before getting involved in 'technological things' and 'before they try the extraordinary things.' For example, party representatives 'must come and see us' or the president should be responsive on the Presidential Hotline. The Cape Town group recognized nevertheless that 'the voters might like that [a democracy app], even if we don't.' A core problem that the app critics raised is that public representatives take orders from the top of their parties' hierarchies, and unless they get compelled to participate and please the people (instead of party bosses) there will be little to drive app uptake.

Several groups point out that there have been multiple projects and campaigns to bring greater accountability in government, largely to no avail. They ask: why would an app suddenly bring about what has been unachievable to date? They also anticipate that an app could be a victim of its own success – so many would want to register their dissatisfaction that it would be impossible to constructively handle all issues that get lodged. The Northdale group furthermore wonders what would differentiate the proposed app from other available platforms: 'We have these platforms already. We can email, you can phone, you can walk up to their office...'

There are some security concerns, mostly relating to the use of apps in general. Many of the critical participants furthermore refer to the possibility that political parties could occupy and 'abuse' an app in order to serve their own propaganda agendas.

### **Dependent on uptake by the politicians**

*'It would only be successful if Number One ... took an interest. And it would be beneficial only if we were guaranteed a response.' 'Otherwise, what is the point? Without responsiveness it would be*



*just another medium where a lot of people are complaining and nothing is being delivered. So, it's a good idea, as long as it is a two-way thing.' 'It's a good thing, but there will be so many complaints... and the response time will be slow.'* (Northdale)

*'Willingness to be good representatives is also influenced by the seniors.' 'It should also have communication with the president.'* (Alexandra)

*'When President Zuma came into office we were encouraged to communicate with him directly... I do not see that [the presidential hotline] now, nothing is being said about it anymore. We used to make calls, tell them about the things needed in our community.'* (Nongoma)

### **Scepticism about chances to bring government accountability**

*'Accountability has not worked in the past. We have told them, "You have promised this but have not delivered"... But nothing happened. So the app probably would not work.'* (Cape Town)

*'They promise this, they promise that. But at the end of the day it turns out to be just a lie. There are too many lies.'* (Belville)

*'I don't see the point. It will not suddenly make them consistent in delivering on their promises. They promise and don't deliver. It will be the same old story.' 'I don't think it will work. These things work in collaboration with money. For you to access them, you need money and many of our youths are unemployed [and without money]. 'This app thing will not work! It's not going to help anyone... You will find yourself writing and writing, but there will be no answer. What's the point?' 'Yes, it's a waste of time.'* (Ramatlabama)

### **Scepticism that an app might bring party propaganda, disrespect**

*'We don't want any more propaganda.' 'We have the information we need.'* (Cape Town)

*'The majority in South Africa voted ANC. So we might complain but then you will have 1,000 people against what you say.'* (Northdale)

*'Even if the app was made for good democracy reasons, there will still be individuals who will use it for themselves. Individuals will post negative things, things like "You know Zuma owes us money"' 'There will always be disrespect from people who are using it. Imagine even my younger brother simply calling President Zuma.'* (Ikageng)

### **Possible overload with complaints**

*'There would be so many complaints... that the response time will be slow.' 'I just don't think that it would be effective in carrying out what we'd want it to.'* (Northdale)

*'Can you imagine how many messages will go to [President] Zuma? He won't be doing anything for our country. He will be busy answering the messages!'* (Ikageng)

### **Concerns about security, mobile access, cost and skill**

*'We don't know whether it is a good idea.' 'There is an element of mistrust about the security of the information and us using apps. Cell phones get lost or stolen.'* (Bongolethu)

*'Is there anonymity if you want it?'* (Leondale)

*'There are people without airtime money. Money is always a problem in social networking.' 'Even if it was free, it will still be a problem. Not all of us can afford to buy cell phones.'* (Ikageng)

## **5.4 App features conducive to democracy**

Participants have clarity, in broad terms, as to what an app should offer them in the quest to get more responsive and effective representative democracy. The main emphasis was at the procedural and operational levels. The youth are adamant that an app shall only be significant if it is interactive and anchored in two-way communication. It must be a platform to meet and engage with politicians and those in government. This is the core feature to

differentiate such as platform from, for example, municipal websites where problems and complaints can be lodged.

Participants stress that for a democracy app to elicit meaningful participation it would need to provide relevant and purposeful information. The youth stress that the platform should be one that empowers them to engage with their government, and empowers them in their own lives. They would like an app with information on jobs, education, and training. Reminders as to the nature of citizen rights might be handy. The youth also have a need to be well informed on exactly what the political parties, and governing parties in particular, are doing to improve people's lives.

Operationally, the youth would welcome an app with the ability to enlist the cooperation of party politicians. There would have to be uptake. Without obligation by government to comment on app communications the youth believe that accountability would be a pipedream. The participants also stress that a successful app would require *skilled, continuous management and development*. 'Get someone competent to implement it and fix the problems as they arise,' advises the Belville group.

### **Nongoma conversation**

The conversation in Nongoma illuminated the essence that a democracy app can only enhance democracy if it is two-directional, thus if there is an obligation on government and the elected representatives to acknowledge and comment:

*'There should be a way to ensure that each and every individual is answered.' 'It must not be something where we write in and they don't respond.' 'What if two million come in and ask questions?' 'On a certain day, government could have about ten people that will sit and just write the responses to the questions.' 'We could be informed that on a certain day so-and-so will be sitting to answer. You can post your question to them the day before.' 'Someone can group together the questions by theme, categorise them.'*

### **Other groups followed through on the requirement of interactive communication**

*'An app for democracy will be a good thing, but it will be even better if we can know that the recipient will respond.' 'It will be a good thing to get our representatives to be effective. For some people to perform better they need to be touched on their tails.' 'We must know that the person is available for us to talk to [him/her].' 'It needs something to enforce immediate response.'* (Alexandra)

*'It must have two-way communication.' 'We must be able to send messages back and engage with them.' 'The politicians must see if we say "nonsense" to their claims or replies.'* (Cape Town)

*'They [the politicians] must be active online.' 'They must be able to respond. Like on Facebook there is a page for the ANC people to post comments and complaints... but they never respond.'* (Phokeng)

*'It would be good if it brings direct communication. Sometimes you pick up a phone but cannot get hold of the right person...'* (Northdale)

*'Such an App should be managed by a professional person, and not someone affiliated to a political party. Such a person must have knowledge and will be able to answer many of the questions... or ensure that the parties answer.'* (Belville)

**APPENDIX A****Focus Group Discussion Guide****November 2014**

<b>DISCUSSION OUTLINE AND TIME ALLOCATIONS</b>			
<b>Section</b>		<b>Duration</b>	<b>Cumulative</b>
		<b>Minutes</b>	
1	Introduction	5	-
2	Mood - Youth and life in South Africa	10	15
3	Political interest	10	25
4	Decision to register as voter, or not for Election 2014 / earlier election	10	35
5	Decision to vote, or not, in Election 2014 or in an earlier election	15	50
6	Other forms of political participation	10	60
7	Elections and parties: information and communication	20	80
8	An App to help young people talk to political parties	15	95
9	Thinking about a next election	5	100
10	Closure	5	105
<b>Total</b>		105	-

**Note:** This appendix is a summary. It excludes operational details such as the guidelines and instructions to the moderators.

**1: INTRODUCTION**

## 1.1:

- a. My name is \_\_\_ and I will be your facilitator for this focus group discussion. Thank you for participating in this research discussion. It is one of about twelve such groups we are doing, in different parts of the country, and all with young people.
- b. Today we want to talk about young people's experiences and opinions about participating in politics in South Africa – both in elections and in the times between elections. We hope to hear your thoughts on communicating with politicians like those who have been elected to represent citizens like you.
- c. There are no right and no wrong answers; all of your opinions are important.
- d. In this discussion we shall often not all agree with one another, and this is perfectly fine. It will make for an interesting discussion!
- e. It is important for you to speak one at a time. Just raise your hand to show me that you are keen to get the next turn.
- f. The discussion – and similar ones we are having – is part of research sponsored by an international non-governmental organization called Freedom House. Freedom House is an NGO that helps to develop, or further develop, democracy in many parts of the world. To do this in South Africa, we have to learn from citizens like you. Freedom House contracted my organisation, the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE), to conduct the discussions, called focus groups. The discussion gives you the chance to express yourself freely, and for me to ask follow-up questions. We learn from you and will record the insights in a report.
- g. A report will be written when we have completed all the groups. We do not use people's names in this report.

The trends from the discussions will be made public, so that everybody can learn from your insights on how to continue building democracy in South Africa.

1.2:

- a. There are a few other people here with me for today's discussion. They are here to help me run the group and to see that you are comfortable. They will be in the background, so please just ignore them while we are having our discussion. We also have a few of the researchers listening to our discussion from behind that window. They are simply there to learn from you. Let's just forget about them.
- b. The person sitting there \_\_\_ is an interpreter / note-taker / general assistant; s/he are just helping us. Let them know if they can help you with anything.

1.3: We will be audio-recording our conversation. This is to help us remember all of the important points when we write our report for Freedom House.

- a. Repeat that the names of the group members are confidential. Even if we mention names here while we chat, those names will not be in any report.

1.4: Let me start off by my telling you something about myself, and then ask you to introduce yourselves ... (i) a word or words your friends would use to describe you; [OR] (ii) is your cell phone an important part of your life?

## **2: GENERAL MOOD, YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES OF LIFE IN SOUTH AFRICA**

2.1: For just a few minutes, and top-of-mind:

Please share with me, how would you describe the lives of young people in South Africa today?

Are things going well for young people? Or, do they have problems? Speaking generally, do you think they are better or worse off than young people, about ten years ago? Briefly tell me why you think this way.

2.2: And how do you feel about your own future? In a sentence or two, how do you see yourself in roughly ten years from now in your personal life, and your work life?

## **3: POLITICAL INTEREST**

Let's think about how interested we are in politics and elections in South Africa ...

3.1: Could you help me do a quick around-the-table? Please each one call out a score for yourself on my question: How interested are you in politics, on a scale of 1 to 5? '1' is the low score or low interest, thus 'not interested in politics at all', and '5' is the high score, signalling 'extremely interested'. What score do you give yourself? Remember, there are no wrong answers!

3.2: How does your interest in politics, or lack of interest, compare with your interest, or not, in elections? Is it the same, stronger, weaker? This time around, how interested were you to vote in the national elections of May 7, 2014? Again, '1' is 'not interested at all' or 'could not care less' and '5' is 'extremely' or 'very interested'.

3.3: Can you think of anything that has happened recently in politics here in South Africa that you thought was really interesting?

## **4: DECISION TO REGISTER AS VOTER, OR NOT, FOR 2014 OR EARLIER ELECTIONS**

You possibly all know that voter registration refers to a citizen of South Africa formally becoming a voter, the process of getting your name, address and ID number onto a national register of voters, in a process that the Electoral Commission (IEC) conducts. In 2013 and early 2014 the IEC organized voter registration days when IEC officials went to communities to conduct this registration.

Some young people choose to register to vote; others are not interested to get registered. We know that it is an important decision to register to vote, but it is just as important if you are not interested in being registered as a voter ...

4.1: By a show of hands, who of you registered as a voter, either for the 2014 elections or before that?

4.2: We are interested to know why you decided to register, or confirmed that you were still registered, or decided against registering ...

For those of you who did not register as voters, I would like to understand why you had decided not to register; please

tell me about your reasons.

It could have been reasons like you did not have the time, or perhaps simply could not be bothered to register, or many other reasons.

And, those of you who did register, or who were already registered, help me understand why you thought it was important to register

Perhaps you simply registered to keep your options open, not sure yet whether you would want to vote or not, or maybe you think it is important for young people to be part of the democratic process, or many perhaps you have other reasons?

- 4.3: Thinking back to your decision to register, or not to register, do you feel it was the right decision? Would you take the same decision today again?

## 5: DECISION TO VOTE, OR NOT, IN ELECTION 2014, OR EARLIER

Let's now talk about voting in either the 2014 national and provincial elections, or in an election before that, perhaps in 2004, 2009 or 2011 ... Not everybody who is registered to vote goes out to vote ... In this section I want to talk to BOTH the registered ones among you, and those who are not registered, but let us start with THREE quick questions for those who are registered, and then over to all of you:

- 5.1: *[Registered voters]* For the registered voters, let's first think back to 7 May 2014, which was Election Day ... Did you go and vote?

- 5.2: *[Registered voters]* Generally speaking, how do you feel about the decision that you made at that time, to vote or not to vote?

For example, did you feel excited? Were you not sure what the fuss is about? Could you see the point of voting, or perhaps not at all?

What would you say your main reason was for going out to vote? And, those of you who did not vote, even if you are registered, please help me understand your main reason for not voting.

- 5.3: *[Registered voters]* The last quick question to the registered ones: About your decision to vote or not to vote: Are you happy it was the right decision, or would you decide differently if tomorrow were Election Day again?

- 5.4: This question is for all of you ... I am going to read you a quick list of what some young people have told us why they did not go and vote in the May elections. Please tell me if any of them also makes sense to you.

Some who did not vote say:

- I was angry with the parties because they only come and talk to us in election time.
- I was scared to go and vote, worried that someone might find out for whom I have voted and then will harm me.

Others say:

- Nothing will be different in politics, whether I vote or not.
- I feel political parties don't care about me, so why should I care about them?

Or they say:

- I did not have enough information – I did not feel I could make an informed decision.
- Voting is for older people; maybe I shall vote in some future election.

## 6: OTHER FORMS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

- 6.1: We all know there are long periods between elections when one can be politically active in many different ways, impacting on social and political life. Think about the kind of things you have done to get somebody in government to do something for your community, or contacted somebody in politics to ask them to do something. Perhaps share an example or two, if you have.

- 6.2: I am also going to note a few other types of activities; I shall skip the ones you have already mentioned. Please tell me whether you have done that type of action. Most of the activities can be online or through action on the ground, please refer to this as well. Just tell me yes or no.

- Contact my local councillor, Member of the Provincial Legislature (MPL) or Member of Parliament (MP) for information or to tell them to do certain things.
- Go to the municipality or provincial government office to report a matter.
- Volunteer for a campaign to get government to address an issue, or signed a petition.

- Work with other community members to do something on your own, which government had neglected, perhaps something like clean up a park or fix a pothole.
- Work with any on-line system to report faults and problems in the community.
- Take part in a community protest, either on local conditions or big national issues.
- Go on strike, about issues at work.
- Do community work, like helping collect clothes or food for people who do not have enough.
- Make a donation to a political organisation, or pay membership fees.
- Follow politicians' or public figures' tweets or Facebook postings on issues of politics and government.
- Get social media news updates, or read about politics in newspapers, listen to it on radio, or watch news on TV.
- Any other type of action you would like to add?

6.3: Which one of these has worked best for you? Let's do a quick around-the-table.

## 7: ELECTIONS AND PARTIES – INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

7.1: Thinking back to the months just before the May 2014 election, did you receive or send information about voter registration, political parties and their manifestos, and the process of voting? Please just tell me 'yes' or 'no' for each of the following, first about receiving and then about sending information:

A: *[TOPICS]* Did you receive any information on:

The political parties, or any party in particular, Voter registration, Voting on Election Day

*[MEDIUM]* Did you get the information via the medium of:

- Mobile technology, Laptop or computer, Telephone voice options = landline or mobile, Radio or television, Newspapers, Pamphlets, bill boards or street / workplace posters

B: *[TOPICS]* I sent information on the topic of:

The political parties, or any party in particular, Voter registration, Voting on Election Day

*[MEDIUM]* I sent the information using:

- Mobile technology, Laptop or computer, Telephone voice options – landline or mobile

7.2: If you use your mobile to get or send much of your information, please tell me how it came to you, or how you sent it. Was it on:

Twitter, Mxit, Facebook, WhatsApp, BBM, Other – which? [SMS?]

7.3: Which of these ones (in the previous question 7.2) did you like best? And, why did you prefer that one (or rate it tops alongside others)? What was it that helped you?

7.4: Did you feel you had or obtained enough information on the issue that you were communicating about (perhaps about parties' policies, or about how representation works), or would it have been useful for you to have had more information?

7.5: Political parties say they would want to talk more to young people, and talk about the issues that really matter ... If you can give them advice, what are the things you want them to talk about?

For example, would you like them to talk about a specific party, or different parties' policies (youth policy, or policy for job creation, or policy to stop corruption in government), about what they are doing for the youth, or how they go about representing citizens? Perhaps you just want them to talk about jobs, education, health services, recreation, crime, substance abuse, corruption, without referring to their parties?

7.6: Let's pretend that I am a representative of the political party that you want information from ... You can ask me right now to tell you things about my party, its leaders, its programmes. Let me hear you! Each one of you, give me a top-of-mind question. Remember to tell me which party you want to get information from, or perhaps you just want to speak in general. Please be frank.

## 8: AN APP TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE TALK TO POLITICAL PARTIES

In this section we are talking about an App to help strengthen democracy in South Africa, one that is used on a mobile phone or a website. Just to make sure we all talk about the same thing, here is my definition of an App:

'A mobile app is a tool that is available on mobile phones and tablets. A mobile app can feature a range of functions from text messaging to simple programs. Some popular mobile apps include Mxit, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter.'

8.1: Do you think you would like access to a website or mobile App (or a combination of both) that helps to put you in direct contact with a political party, or with various parties? Do you think this could be a good thing, or don't you really care about such a tool?

Do you think this would work for you? Perhaps give you the information that can help you to tell politicians whether they are doing their work or not? Or, would you say it is just a gimmick and 'nothing will work to get politicians more connected'?

8.2: Do you know who your Member of Parliament (MP), Member of Provincial Legislature (MPL) or your local councillor is? If you know any one of them, do you also know their names?

Any examples, please, of their names?

8.3: Do you believe these representatives have the ability to deliver on the promises they and their parties have made to voters? And do you think they are keen to be good representatives, have the willingness?

8.4: Please help us think about an App to help democracy in South Africa work better. Please give us advice, for example on how to make it work, the kinds of things you would like to see on an App like that, how to encourage young people to make use of it.

For example: should there be a discussion forum of some kind? A place where you can post your concerns and other, including elected leaders, can comment on them?

## **9: THINKING OF A NEXT ELECTION**

Thinking forward to the local government elections that we shall have in about two years from now, in 2016 ...

9.1: Do you think you will vote then?

9.2: What would make you go and vote in that election?

## **10: CLOSURE**

END

## APPENDIX B

# Geographic Parameters and Conducting the Focus Groups

### Recruiting the focus groups

The following are the geographic details of focus group recruitment in the four provinces:

#### **Gauteng:**

The Mabopane group's participants came from Mabopane (north of Pretoria), Hammanskraal and the area in-between. In the case of the Alexandra groups all participants were from Alexandra (Sandton / Johannesburg) itself. The Leondale group's participants were from Leondale and Dawn Park, as well as other Ekurhuleni suburbs in close proximity.

#### **KwaZulu-Natal:**

The Nongoma (northern KwaZulu-Natal or Zululand) group participants were from Nongoma itself and the villages surrounding Nongoma. The Umlazi (eThekweni) participants came from the different sections of Umlazi, for example sections A, B and C. In the case of Northdale, participants were from the suburbs surrounding, and including, Northdale and Mountain Rise.

#### **North West:**

The participants largely came from single-community areas: all Ramatlabama participants were from the same village near Mafikeng. All in the Ikageng group were from the Ikageng township in Potchefstroom, Tlokwe municipality, and all in the Phokeng group were from the same village in Rustenburg.

#### **Western Cape:**

Cape Town group's participants came from Cape Town's northern and southern suburbs, the Cape Flats and the central parts of Cape Town. Respondents from the suburbs lived in both formerly white and 'non-white' (black) suburbs. All of the Bongoletu, Oudtshoorn participants were from this specific township on the outskirts the town of Oudtshoorn. The low to mid-level education white group from the greater Cape Town had participants from Belville, Kuils River and Brackenfell.

### Conducting the focus groups

Both the participant homogeneity and the style of focus group moderation facilitate discussions that are relaxed non-threatening and truthful. The project's discussions suggested that participants felt free to share their experiences and insights. Focus groups discussions are all about experiences, perceptions and insights – never about right or wrong answers. The participants in our groups were briefed on this. Participation was voluntary and largely enthusiastic, within natural parameters of some participants being more extroverted than others and many young South Africans interested but cynical about politics.

The discussions were conducted in the language that is most common in the areas of the designated focus groups. In most instances there was a variation in the languages used, and participants felt free to express themselves. The predominant language in Gauteng's Mabopane group was Setswana, in Alexandra isiZulu and Leondale English. In KwaZulu-Natal the Northdale group was in English and the Umlazi and Nongoma groups in isiZulu. The North West groups of Ramatlabama, Ikageng and Phokeng were all predominantly in Setswana. In the Western Cape the Bongoletu group was in isiXhosa, the Cape Town group in English and the Belville group in Afrikaans.

The groups were conducted by skilled focus group moderators, all designated and/or employed by CASE. They were chosen to match the predominant demographics of the focus groups as closely as possible. Synopses of the profiles and experience of the moderators follow in Appendix C.

The discussion guide provided for a range of screener items – ensuring that only those participants who for example had registered as voters, or had voted, would share their opinions on their reasons for voting, etc. This was to help guarantee the reliability and validity of the research findings. This was the approach across a range of the discussion items (see the discussion guide, Appendix A).



**APPENDIX C****Focus Group Moderators – Synopsis of Profiles**

The following seven CASE moderators were responsible for conducting the focus group discussions:

<b>Moderator</b>	<b>Moderating experience and brief background</b>
<b>Bongani Khumalo</b>	About 5-6 years of moderating experience for CASE. He had worked as a fieldwork manager for a long time. He is also close to the data collection process and methodology (qualitative and quantitative) processes.
<b>Renee Lewis</b>	About 14 years moderating experience. In addition to academic training, Renee was also trained by Soul City in qualitative data collection methods. She is familiar with different techniques of moderating.
<b>Vainola Makan</b>	Long working history as a women's rights and social justice activist and a graduate from the University of the Western Cape. She has extensive research and policy analysis experience, and has 18 years of experience of moderating.
<b>Mohamed Motala</b>	About 8-10 years of moderating experience. Mohamed has taught research methodology and lectured at Wits School of Governance. He is adept at probing and analysis, and is furthering his doctoral studies.
<b>Martha Qumba</b>	Martha has worked for a number of NGOs doing data collection, analysis and write-up. She is has about 10 years of moderating experience.
<b>Mandla Vilakazi</b>	About 5-6 years of moderating experience with CASE. He has extensive experience as a fieldwork coordinator. He coordinates the data collection process and directs methodology (qualitative and quantitative).
<b>Onalenna Vilakazi</b>	Onalenna has a background in project management, along with 4-5 years of interviewing and focus group moderating experience.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 See for example Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), 2008, South African Social Attitudes Survey, The young and the restless: political apathy and the youth, <http://www.hsrc.ac.za/uploads/pageContent/1607/The%20Young%20and%20The%20Restless.pdf>;  
Benjamin Roberts, Jare Struwig, Steven Gordon, Yul Derek Davids, Jenna Lee Marco, 2014, IEC Voter Participation Survey 2013/14: Key Findings. Report prepared for the Electoral Commission of South Africa. Pretoria, Human Sciences Research Council. This latter report does not provide insights or statistics of note into youth orientations towards elections and political participation generally.
- 2 <http://www.sarpn.org/CountryPovertyPapers/SouthAfrica/june2002/mkandawire/page3.php>, accessed 2 October 2014, based on the National Youth Policy of 1996, 2000,
- 3 National Youth Policy 2009-2014, 9 March 2009, <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/MediaLib/Downloads/Home/Publications/YouthPublications/NationalYouthPolicyPDF/NYP.pdf>, accessed 2 October 2014; and Draft National Youth Policy 2014-2019, April 2015 (date on document), p. 17.
- 4 According to the IEC, there are 6,470,494 people between the ages of 18 and 29 on the voters' register; see <http://www.elections.org.za/content/Voters-Roll/Registration-statistics/>. The official definition of 'youth' in South Africa is 14-35 years, but IEC voter statistics follow the 18-29 and 30-39 year categorisations (18 is the official entry level voting age).
- 5 See the National Development Plan (NDP) 2012, based on Statistics South Africa 2011.
- 6 This trend is carefully monitored in the analysis, given that discussions will often tend towards problems and controversies, rather than the 'good news' of things that are going well. To counter this tendency the discussions specifically catered for probing and encouragement to note both the positive and negative.
- 7 This report adopts the term 'cohort' for the grouping who was 'youth' from roughly 1990 onward, and uses previous 'generation' of youth for those who were youth in the apartheid, pre-transition days up to 1990.
- 8 In the words of Robert Mattes, 2011: '... whatever advantages might accrue from the new political experiences of political freedom and a regular, peaceful, electoral process, are diminished by frustrating encounters with the political process, victimization by corrupt officials, and enduring levels of unemployment and poverty'. See "The 'Born Frees': The Prospects for Generational Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa", Afrobarometer Working Papers, No. 131(2), pp. 1-18. Athi Nxusani, June 2012, Born free! But dying young: A post-mortem on youth and democracy in South Africa, Paper delivered at the IEC Youth Indaba, 26 June, 2012, Aliwal North, South Africa also captures such sentiments, equally captures of dismal feelings about negative conditions.
- 9 Whoonga (alternatively 'nyaope' or 'wunga') is a street drug that has come into widespread use in South Africa. The drug is sometimes alleged to contain HIV antiretroviral drugs. Sample analyses, however, have revealed no such content. One claim is the drug contains classic psychoactive substances like cannabis, methamphetamine, or heroin which are potentiated by interactions with the antiretroviral ritonavir. Some experts argue that whoonga is essentially a rebranding of older heroin based drugs.
- 10 South Africa accepts the definition of youth as up to 35 years old. In recent developments there have been arguments by the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) for the qualification age to be extended to 40 years. In addition, the child support grant in South Africa may be extended up to 23 years of age. In 2014 the Minister of Social Development announced: 'In 2015/2016 financial year we are going to be looking into the issue of children up until the age of 18. Secondly we want to look into the issue of foster children between the ages of 19 and 23 and many other children who are grant recipients but their parents are unemployed. We want to come up with a comprehensive programme to ensure that children don't get disturbed up until they are 23.' <http://www.sabc.co.za/news/a/97eaf80445387868c22aefc6ab42bce/Child-support-grant-to-be-expanded-to-age-23-20141106>, accessed 2 February 2014.
- 11 With reference to the National Executive Committee (NEC) top elected governing body of the African National Congress (ANC).
- 12 In this particular instance, in Bongoletu (Oudtshoorn, Western Cape) youth activities were under control of coloured persons deployed by central government; the black citizen then felt excluded or discriminated against.
- 13 The Alexandra group have the upper educational qualifications of matric. At this stage therefore they do not have specialist qualifications in the construction field.
- 14 Roberts et al., 2014, op. cit., found that only 50 percent of the youth surveyed reckoned that the youth in South Africa are interested in politics.
- 15 Details follow in the rest of the section: In short, the transaction entails that there will be voters' roll evidence that they are registered voters, a stamp in their ID books to confirm that they had voted, and, beyond that, that nothing to suggest they had been disloyal to the dominant party, the party whose principals need to be impressed.
- 16 In a March 2014 Mxit survey, conducted by Pondering Panda for Freedom House, there was an indicated low propensity to vote among younger South Africans. Only half the respondents claimed that they would definitely vote in the 2014 national and provincial elections. See Pondering Panda for Freedom House, March 2014, Pre-election research.
- 17 None of the discussion guide themes introduced discussions of specific political parties, or or the ANC in particular. All mentions of political parties were spontaneous.
- 18 'Bafana Bafana' is the colloquial name for South Africa's national soccer team.
- 19 A Mercedes Benz model that the participants say is popular in the townships.
- 20 Marikana refers to the mass killing (44 died, overall) of striking mineworkers in the North West province by the police (August 2012). At the time of the study the judicial inquiry into the event was still underway.
- 21 The issue pertains to the splits and fall-out in the South African Congress of Trade Unions (Cosatu). Cosatu is a member of the Tripartite Alliance, also comprising the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP). Cosatu's biggest affiliate union, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa), resisted pressures to support the ANC government uncritically. At the time of the study there was still great uncertainty on the final outcome of the dispute, including whether Cosatu's secretary-general, Zwelinzima Vavi (on the Numsa side, and under threat of disciplinary action by Cosatu), would remain in Cosatu.
- 22 E-tolling of the Gauteng freeways was a contentious and prolonged battle between citizen organisations and the state. Citizens resisted, largely because of what was seen as exorbitant charges. These e-tolls were seen as one of the main reasons for a decline in ANC support in Gauteng in the May 2014 election. At the time of the study widespread boycotts persisted, along with ANC government efforts to find compromise in the form of a moderated fee structure.
- 23 See for example, Elnari Potgieter and Barend F. Lutz 2014, 'South African Youth: Politically Apathetic?' SA Elections 2014: The Final Issues – Private Funding of Political Parties, Youth Participation and New Political Entrants, South Africa 2014 Election Updates, Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa. The authors similarly argue that 'young South Africans' participation in formal political activities might be worrisome, but this does not render the youth politically apathetic' (p. 25).
- 24 Lauren Tracey, 2014. 'SA Elections: first-time voters need more effective education.' ISS Today, 5 May 2014, <http://www.issafrica.org/iss-today/sa-elections-first-time-voters-need-more-effective-education>, accessed 14 November 2014.
- 25 For purposes of this discussion a mobile app was defined as 'a tool that is available on mobile phones and tablets. A mobile app can feature a range of functions from text messaging to simple programs. Some popular mobile apps include Mxit, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter.' See Appendix A.



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