

Voter Turnout in the South Africa 2024 National and Provincial Elections 29 May 2024

GetMetrix DataByte No. 1

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The first ever GetMetrix DataByte is finally ready to share with you. We had some really wild ideas for our first issue, but we've opted for consistency, quality and concise analysis, which are the focus of everything we do at GetMetrix. Your time is precious, so we don't want to waste it.

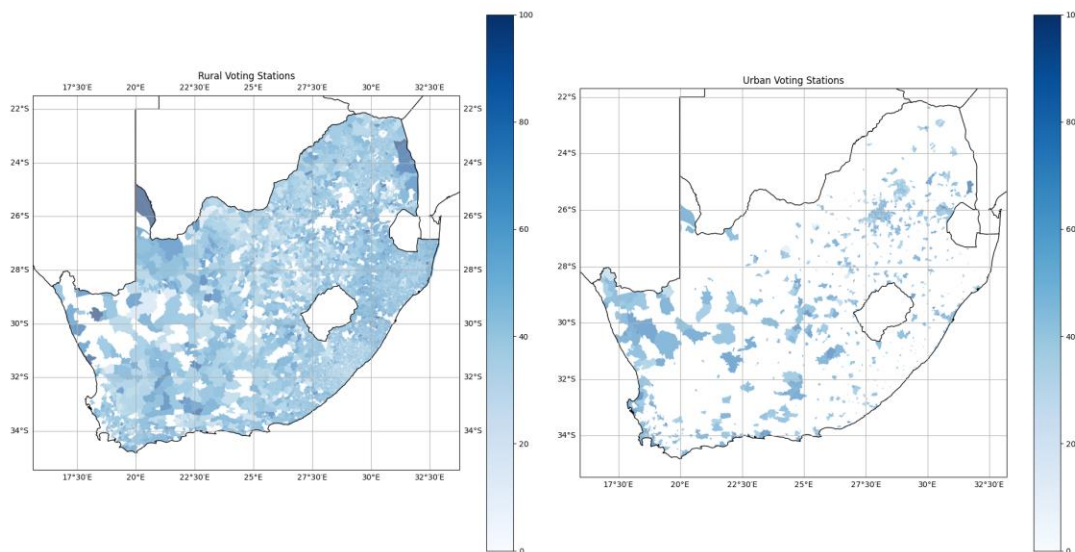


Figure 1 - Rural vs Urban Voter Turnout Distribution 29 May 2024

Voter Turnout in 2024

The triumph of the 1994 elections was about the right of the majority of disenfranchised South Africans to vote for the government of their choice, and was greeted with the enthusiasm of a nation released from its oppression. On 29 April 1994, **86.87%** of the adult residents of South Africa participated in the historic polls. An unknown number of non-South African citizens were deemed eligible to vote in 1994 due to political concerns relating to eligibility based on South African identity documentation. In 1999, under a new, permanent Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), a clearer picture of voter turnout based on national citizenship emerged, with a registered voter turnout of **89.3%**. This remains the post-1994 high watermark for registered voter turnout, as percentage turnout oscillated around 75% between 2004 - 2014. By 2019, the disengagement of voters from the democratic process was no longer academic, as both the absolute and turnout percentages

fell compared to 2014. This trend has accelerated even further in 2024, with registered voter turnout settling at **58.7%**, the lowest in 7 elections under the democratic dispensation.

Table 1 - Historical Turnout of Registered Voters since 1994

Year	Votes Cast	Registered Voters	Turnout (%)
1994	19,533,498	22,709,152	86.02
1999	16,228,462	18,172,751	89.30
2004	15,863,558	20,674,923	76.73
2009	17,919,966	23,181,997	77.30
2014	18,654,771	25,388,082	73.48
2019	17,672,851	26,756,649	66.05
2024	16,262,506	27,723,279	58.66

However, voter turnout figures in South Africa appear even less healthy when measured using the wider Voting Age Population percentage. This measurement tests the number of votes cast against the estimated number of adult citizens eligible to vote (whether they registered to vote or not). While South Africa did conduct a census in 2022, demographers have serious concerns about the comprehensiveness of the exercise. Available estimates place the eligible voting age population in 2024 somewhere between 40.2 and 43.3 million adults. Even by the most optimistic measure, this means that only **40.4%** of adult South Africans participated in the 2024 elections. In 2024, the single most popular party, the African National Congress (ANC) secured **6,459,692** votes which equates to barely more than **16%** of adult South Africans. Whether by coalition agreement or as a minority government, the political party most likely to lead South Africa from 2024 to 2029 enjoys a mere **16%** support from South Africans eligible to vote.

Rural vs Urban Turnout Patterns

Figure 1 (above) shows the distribution of South Africa's rural and urban voting districts (as classified by the IEC in its database). Since 2004, the governing ANC party has been losing support in urban areas across the country, making it more reliant on rural voters to shore up its support. During the tenure of President Jacob Zuma, these losses in urban areas were less pronounced due to the surge in the ANC's performance in rural KwaZulu-Natal, Zuma's home province. However, Zuma's successor, Cyril Ramaphosa, did not enjoy similar support in rural KZN, and the 2019 elections saw the ANC rely heavily on the provinces of Limpopo, Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and Free State for their diminishing majority in the National Assembly. 2024 saw the ongoing fragmentation of voting blocs in urban areas of Gauteng, but more importantly, the ANC's performance in its historically strongest provinces declined significantly. The primary focus on the collapse of support for the ANC in KwaZulu-Natal at the hands of the Mkhonto we Sizwe party, fronted by its own former President Jacob Zuma, has stolen the headlines and is attributed with the ANC's weakest electoral performance to date. However, this masks a potentially even more serious malaise in its traditional strongholds. We'll look into these specific dynamics in future DataBytes.

Figure 2 shows the frequency distribution of turnout as a percentage in urban vs rural areas. Although there are fewer urban voting districts in South Africa, **64%** of registered voters were in these urban districts. On 29 May 2024, the number of urban votes cast was higher at **66.4%**. Urban voters turned out in higher numbers and as a higher proportion of the overall electorate than the rural voters. This figure might have been even higher but for the rural support for the MK Party in northern rural KwaZulu-Natal (see Figure 1).

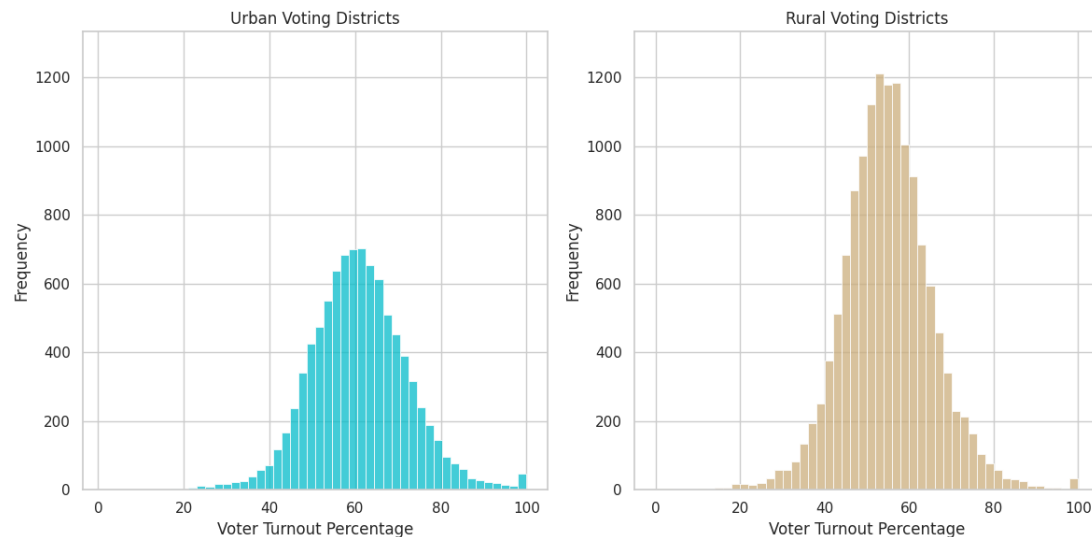


Figure 2 - Rural vs Urban Voter Frequency Distribution 29 May 2024

i Note

A few voting stations with a small number of registered voters reported a voter turnout percentage much greater than 100%. This is an acceptable result, as voters are not limited to voting at the specific voting station where they are registered in National and Provincial elections. However, the outliers did present a challenge for structuring data visualisations. To preserve readability of the frequency distribution plots, we limited the X-axis (Voter Turnout Percentage) to a maximum of 100%.

For the governing ANC, its flagging fortunes in the 2024 elections were compounded by a failure to “activate its base”. In addition to fewer voters voting in general, fewer of its supporters showed up. While this might sound like good news for opposition parties looking to supplant the ANC in the future, it is worth reminding them that the single biggest bloc of “voters” in 2024 voted with their feet, and turned away from the ballot booth without a remark. Thirty years into South Africa’s democracy, the right to vote was dismissed more emphatically than any political party. For those who love democracy, there is much work ahead.

If you liked our analysis or want to suggest a particular topic related to data exploration, please reach out to us [here](#).