



INCLUSIVE SOCIETY INSTITUTE

MEDIA RELEASE

SURVEY SUGGESTS VOTER SUPPORT FOR PARTY SYSTEM IN SOUTH AFRICA Believe local link with representatives will improve accountability

In response to the 2020 Constitutional Court judgement compelling Parliament to amend the Electoral Act to provide for independent candidates to stand for election to the national and provincial legislatures, the Inclusive Society Institute (ISI) recently released its proposals for electoral reform in South Africa. The main tenets of the institute's proposal is the introduction of 66 Multi-Member Constituencies (MMCS) comprising between 3 and 7 representatives per MMC, with a compensatory PR-list to ensure overall proportionality in the legislature. Independent candidates and parties will compete for seats within each MMC. Through the introduction of MMCs delineated along the current district and metropolitan council boundaries, geographic representivity will be enhanced.

Methodology

To test voter's views on amendments to the electoral system, a survey was conducted amongst eligible voters. To ensure representivity across all demographic groups, and to ensure a fair urban/rural split, the institute supplemented the online survey (two-thirds), with face-to-face interviews – biased in favour of non-metropolitan areas (one-third). A further adjustment was made by weighting the demographic groups to ensure that they align with their proportional share of the total population. In total, 1192 valid responses were received, resulting in a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error.

Findings

The first material finding was that the vast majority (89%) of voters support the Constitutional Court ruling that independent candidates should be allowed to stand for election to the national and provincial legislatures.

The second material findings was that an overwhelming majority of voters (two-thirds) wish to retain proportional representation in the legislatures. That means that any electoral system, such as first-past-the-post, that does not allow for a compensatory list to ensure overall party proportionality in parliament, should be rejected.

The third material finding was that most voters (75%) wanted to cast their ballots in favour of local candidates that would represent their specific geographic areas.

The fourth material finding was that 85% of the respondents were of the view that by electing local representatives accountable to specific constituencies, it would result in greater accountability by those representatives to the voter.

And lastly, as to whether the voter should vote for a specific candidate or for a list of candidates nominated by a party, the outcome was less stark. In this regard, 58% of the respondents favoured voting for a specific individual, whilst 42% indicated that they would be happy for party prioritised candidates.

There appears to be little difference between the opinions of younger and older voters, and between genders. The table below shows that across all findings similar trends emerged, with the largest differentiation being within 5 percentage points of the overall electorate. The starkest difference that emerged was that female voters appeared to be more trustworthy of parties in that both in terms of the importance for representatives to be accountable to specific areas and whether to vote for a specific candidate or party, they lent more towards the party than the specific candidate. That said, the general trend held.

Finding	Overall	< 36	Gender	
			M	F
Agree independent candidates should be able to stand	89%	90%	91%	88%
Important for representatives to be accountable to specific areas	75%	79%	82%	74%
Local representation will improve accountability	85%	87%	89%	84%
Would like to vote for specific candidate (as opposed to party)	58%	58%	61%	53%
Overall proportionality should be retained	66%	63%	61%	67%

However, as highlighted in the table below, whilst the same general trends were recorded across the various demographic groups, it appears that the minority communities were slightly stronger in favour of independent candidates standing, were very much more in favour of candidates representing specific geographic areas, and somewhat more optimistic that the introduction of local representation would lead to greater accountability.

A further surprising finding was that the white and Indian communities were less attached to the system of proportionality than their black and coloured compatriots. This despite it generally being accepted that a PR system best accommodates minority communities. Nevertheless, there was still a strong majority amongst these communities in support of a system that ensures proportional representation in the legislatures.

The other outlier was the coloured community that were more strongly in favour of voting for specific candidates as opposed to party prioritised candidates.

Finding	Demographic group				
	All	Black	White	Coloured	Indian
Agree independent candidates should be able to stand	89%	88%	93%	92%	89%
Important for representatives to be accountable to specific areas	75%	73%	87%	80%	86%
Local representation will improve accountability	85%	84%	91%	86%	83%
Would like to vote for specific candidate	58%	57%	58%	68%	61%
Overall proportionality should be retained	66%	66%	58%	72%	56%

Conclusion

It appears that whilst respondents are strongly in support of the Constitutional Court ruling to allow for independent candidates to stand for election to the national and provincial legislatures, most will continue to back political parties in future elections. This is evident from their strong support for the new electoral system to retain mechanisms that will ensure that overall proportionality is reflected in the legislatures. That said, they were resolute that public representative accountability to the voter needed to be improved.

The outcome of the survey seems to support the Inclusive Society Institute's proposals.

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