

Article

Social grants, food parcels and voting behaviour: a case study of three South African communities

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Abstract

Since the 2009 general election in South Africa there has been significant speculation about the electoral power of the over 16 million social grant beneficiaries. Equally controversial has been the issuing of food parcels by the government before local government by-elections in 2013. A quantitative study was undertaken in three poor communities in South Africa – Riverlea and Doornkop in Johannesburg and in Groblersdal in the Limpopo province to establish the voting behaviour of poor people ('poor' being defined in terms of income level). This article focuses mainly on the role that social grants and food parcels play in voting behaviour. Among other things, it was found that grant receipt has some influence on how people vote but that it is not the driving factor. Though the majority of respondents regard the handing out of food parcels before elections as 'bribery', over a quarter still indicated that they would vote for a party that gave them food parcels.¹

Introduction

South Africa's national election in 2014 saw the African National Congress (ANC) win 62 per cent of the total votes, followed by the Democratic Alliance (DA) with 22 per cent and the Economic Freedom Fighters with 6 per cent (Electoral Commission of South Africa 2014). No official statements are provided by any of the parties about their election budgets, but unofficial figures estimate that the ANC outspent its main rival, the DA, by four or five times (Plaut 2014).

The ANC has been accused of not running entirely clean election campaigns, including accusations of the party's use of state resources in its

electioneering (Plaut 2014). According to Bruce (2014), a primary way in which political intimidation is practised in South Africa includes manipulating people, using misinformation and threats regarding pensions and grants. Although it is not necessarily a feature of life in all poor communities, intimidation and other forms of manipulation are a systematic feature of political life in South Africa where people in poorer communities are vulnerable to the manipulation of their position of need, their economic vulnerability and dependence on the state (Bruce 2014).

Against this background, this article focuses mainly on the role of social grants and food parcels in voter preference within the context of the various explanations of voting behaviour.

Over the years studies on multi-party elections worldwide have identified a number of factors in explaining voting behaviour, that is, why a person votes for one party rather than another. These are encapsulated in different models of voting behaviour such as the Sociological, Party Identification, Rational Choice, and Clientelistic models. Whereas the Sociological model is based on social determinants such as ethnicity, race, class, gender, religious affiliation, educational background, occupation, social status, geography and regional ties or identities (Catt 1996) which, together, could 'mould a distinctive social identity that in turn is reflected in party allegiance and voting behaviour' (Peele 2004: 323), the Rational Choice model suggests that voters base their electoral choices on rational considerations motivated by self-interest (Chandler 1988, Brooks et al 2006). The voter is seen as a rational actor who votes in a calculated and deliberate way based on information about the possible impact of an election on that voter's life and well-being (Himmelweit et al 1981). Voters therefore become consumers, comparing products before purchasing them. Factors that inform this type of voting behaviour would include, for example, a party's record in government, personal popularity of the party's leaders, and voters' perception on the direction of the economy, particularly with regard to taxation, unemployment and income distribution (Sanders 2003). Voters' feelings of safety, stability and comfort within the economy have become increasingly important in predicting voting behaviour with voters using the ballot to reward government for good economic performance and to punish them for bad (Nadeau et al 2012, Bratton et al 2012). Other scholars refer to this 'credit' and 'blame' voting as being not merely relevant to economic issues but also generalised to other areas including policy performances in health and education (Marsh and Tilley 2010). According to the Party Identification

Model, however, voters have a sense of identification with a particular political party and express their long-term loyalty by continually voting for that party (Miller 1991, Kovenock and Robertson 2008, Peele 2004).

Finally, patronage, or clientelism, can also be an important determinant of voting behaviour (Bratton and van de Walle 1997, van de Walle 2003). In a clientelistic relationship politicians tend to use their power to provide economic privileges or other material favours to voters in return for their political support at the polls (Wantchekon 2003, Stokes 2007, Vicente and Wantchekon 2009, Szwarcberg 2013). A form of clientelism often referred to as ‘vote-buying’ has been found to be prevalent in Africa and emphasises the handing out of money and gifts to win voters during election campaigns. See, for example, research on Benin (Wantchekon 2003, Koter 2013), Ghana (Lindberg 2003), Nigeria (Bratton 2008), Kenya (Kramon 2009), São Tomé and Príncipe (Vicente and Wantchekon 2009), Malawi and Mozambique (Birch 2011) and Senegal (Koter 2013).

Voter preference in South Africa’s first four democratic elections has been linked to a number of determinants. Scholars such as Lodge (1995), Guelke (1996), Johnson (1996), Davis (2003) and Ferree (2004 and 2006) have all argued that elections have been nothing more than a ‘racial’ census, with the majority of African people supporting the ANC and the majority of white people supporting the DA. Some elements of ethnic and regional voting have also been evident especially in the 1994 and 1999 elections. An example is the support for the Inkatha Freedom Party particularly in KwaZulu-Natal (Letsholo 2005: 2-3). The influence of race on the voting behaviour of coloured and Indian people seems, on the contrary, less significant (Ferree 2004: 14). However, others contest this ‘racial arithmetic’, arguing that voters are not unthinking and irrational people who vote according to their skin colour (Taylor and Hoeane 1999). In this regard Mattes et al (1999: 245-6) argue that performance and delivery, a strong election campaign, and the obstacles that opposition parties face in convincing voters to ‘take them as a real alternative’, also shape the choice of voters. Though, how voters perceive performance and campaigns are shaped by race, class and ethnicity and the interactions among them.

Party identification (and loyalty) is also often used to explain voting behaviour in South Africa (Habib and Naidu 2006). The ANC has a dominant position in South African politics because it is perceived as a liberation party – the historic bearer of democracy – while opposition parties such as the DA (the official opposition party) suffer from a legitimacy problem (Letsholo

2005: 5). Furthermore, this crisis of legitimacy is used by the ANC as a mechanism to discredit its opponents and thus be seen as the sole legitimate representative of the interests of South Africans (Letsholo 2005: 5). As a consequence, despite the fact that some voters complain about the way the ANC rules the country, they will continue to vote for it because the other parties, particularly the DA, are perceived as being a remnant of the apartheid regime.

Though, while scholars argue that party identification and affiliation are still prominent in South Africa, they are combined with issue-based voting (as noted above) especially with government performance on issues such as service delivery, poverty, unemployment, and health (Kersting 2009: 131-2, McLaughlin 2008, Young 2009). However, very little is known about the voting behaviour of poor people in the country and, in particular, the role that social grants and food parcels play in voter preference. The poor constitute a large proportion of the country's 53 million people with 35.9 per cent living in relative poverty (South Africa Survey 2013: 645).² Consequently, the number of social grant beneficiaries in 2013 in South Africa stood at 16,577,017 (South Africa Survey 2013: 645), covering nearly a third of the population. A great deal of speculation exists about the electoral power of grant beneficiaries and their role in securing electoral support for the ANC.

The party has been accused of using the social grant system as a vote-buying mechanism to win the support of poor voters (*News24* March 17, 2011, *The Star* April 26, 2013). This issue became particularly pertinent in view of the 2014 general elections when KwaZulu-Natal agriculture's MEC Meshack Radebe's stated in early April 2014 that those who received social welfare grants but voted for opposition political parties were 'stealing from government' (*The Mercury* April 9, 2014). It has also been reported that 'the ANC has gone out of its way to market the fact that it has not only expanded social grants, but that social grants are a gift specifically from the ANC government, which can or may be taken away if an opposition party, specifically the DA, comes to power' (*DispatchLive* May 24, 2014). Equally controversial has been the issuing of food parcels by the government before elections. In the run-up to the 2009 elections there were reports that food parcels were being distributed by the ANC to persuade poor voters to vote in the party's favour (Graham 2014). Prior to the 2013 by-elections in Tlokwe (North West), the ANC was accused of using food distribution to sweeten voters in its favour in municipalities in which the party was in danger of losing support. In addition, a representative of the Kenneth Kaunda

municipality allegedly warned residents that if the ANC-led government lost power, they would lose grants and food parcels (*City Press* August 3, 2013). In 2014 the ANC was again accused of distributing food parcels in parts of the Eastern Cape ahead of the municipal by-elections and asking residents to vote for the party. Residents claimed that ANC officials took them to the offices of the SA Social Services Agency (Sassa) where they collected the food parcels containing rice, flour, maize meal, samp, beans, cooking oil, canned fish and sugar (*News24* January 17, 2014).³

Despite the existing body of research that supports the role of grants in alleviating poverty in South Africa, there continues to be much debate about the unintended negative consequences of grants. Worldwide, the poor are often portrayed as needy due to their own inadequacies. Consequently, receiving social benefits is looked down upon and stigmatised. In South Africa, clear negative discourses on social assistance receipt have emerged, for example, that cash transfer systems create welfare-dependence and that the Child Support Grant encourages women to have multiple children (Hochfeld and Plagerson 2011). Hochfeld and Plagerson (2011) illustrate the complex relationship between poverty and welfare receipt among the poor wherein grant recipients explain poverty from a structural perspective; however, they express feelings of shame and embarrassment as a result of being poor. It is often argued that grants lead to weakening the incentive to work, promote idleness and encourage a culture of dependency. However, several studies have found no evidence of such dependency. These include studies by Neves et al (2009) and the Human Science Research Council in South Africa (Roberts 2004, 2006, and Noble and Ntshongwana 2008). Roberts, in the later report, highlights the fact that respondents favour government interventions to help the poor; while Noble and Ntshongwana refute the notion of a ‘dependency’ culture arguing instead that receipt of the child support grant does not discourage people from finding work. In addition, longitudinal studies by SALDRU (2013: 4) among rural unemployed African youth in KwaZulu-Natal and unemployed urban coloured and African youth in the Cape found ‘no evidence that the introduction of state cash transfers into households leads youth in rural and urban areas to choose to be “idle”’. However, Seekings (2014, in citing his studies in 2007 and 2010) highlights the complexity of attitudes towards social welfare. Although poor people see most of the poor as deserving of public assistance, specific categories of people are more deserving than others. The elderly, sick and disabled, and care-givers are regarded as the most deserving, while

the involuntary unemployed are slightly less deserving and the culpable unemployed (for example, those who had lost jobs because they stole) the least deserving (Seekings 2014: 12).

Though studies on vote-buying and particularly the role of social grants have not been undertaken in South Africa until recently, it has over the years been a topic of research elsewhere in the world. Governments (especially in a middle-income country) can effectively exploit social protection benefits for political dividends through electoral support. Studies in Argentina (Stokes 2005), Brazil (Hall 2006, 2012, and Hunter and Power 2007), and Mexico (Magaloni 2014) have all illustrated how social grants have been utilised as election strategies.

Studies on clientelism have been conducted using ethnographic research and policy implementation analyses (Weitz-Shapiro 2012). Ethnographic research has illuminated the inner workings of clientelistic exchange. However, the intense amount of fieldwork it requires makes these studies difficult. A strategy to circumvent measuring clientelism directly is to compare instead how politicians implement policy through their spending on public and private goods. The ease of collection makes these attractive measures but they are nonetheless problematic as the process required to make any public good embeds many private goods within it (Weitz-Shapiro 2012).

In establishing the voting behaviour of poor people in South Africa opinion surveys have been conducted during the latter half of 2013 in two poor urban communities and one poor rural community in Limpopo province. The particular focus of this article is whether social grants and food parcels play a role in the voting behaviour of the people in these three communities.

Methodology

The study was conducted in June 2013 in three research sites that were purposively sampled – the urban areas of Doornkop and Riverlea in Johannesburg and the more rural area of Elias Motsoaledi Local Municipality (Groblersdal) in the Limpopo province. Criteria for sampling included ‘poor’ communities (broadly defined) with a relatively high uptake of social grants, both urban and rural communities, and communities with diverse voting profiles. In the 2011 local government elections, 90 per cent voted for the ANC in Doornkop while 47 per cent supported the ANC in Riverlea (Electoral Commission of South Africa – local government elections 2011). In wards 9 and 11 in Groblersdal (Elias Motsoaledi Local Municipality) the ANC received 47 per cent and 36 per cent respectively of the vote in the 2011 local

election, with the Mpumalanga Party receiving more support in these areas with 45 per cent and 58 per cent respectively.

The majority of Groblersdal respondents live in formal housing while Doornkop and Riverlea are characterised by a mix of formal housing, backyard shacks, and some informal housing. The focus on a contrast between both urban and rural areas is warranted in view of the increasing mobilisation, organisation and politicisation of urban voters.

Existing data from Statistics South Africa provided a base upon which to estimate the sample size for this study. A total of 1,204 respondents were interviewed for this study – 402 in Riverlea; 402 in Doornkop and 400 in Groblersdal.

Multi-stage random sampling was utilised to reach the sample of approximately 400 in each of the three chosen areas.⁴ The sample was drawn in stages, with wards being selected at the first stage, dwelling units within the wards being selected in the second stage, and respondents selected at the third stage. With the aid of the most recent maps, boundaries of the voting districts within each ward were defined and each dwelling within these boundaries was counted. For systematic sampling of households, an interval was determined by dividing the total number of houses or stands in a voting district by the number of interviews required in that voting district. An interval of 15 was used for Doornkop, 40 for Riverlea and 11 for both wards in Groblersdal. Once the interval had been established, a random starting point was identified. One individual per household was selected using the Kish grid after a comprehensive listing exercise was completed of all eligible individuals at the dwelling unit. In addition, a gender quota was used to ensure that there was a gender balance among respondents.

A questionnaire was developed consisting of 29 closed-ended questions and three open-ended questions. It was translated into Afrikaans and Zulu and piloted in Doornkop and Riverlea after which amendments were made to simplify and clarify certain questions.

All fieldwork was carried out by trained local fieldworkers under the supervision of experienced fieldwork supervisors and a fieldwork manager. In Riverlea and Doornkop, some of the field work was also conducted by 15 students from the Department of Politics at the University of Johannesburg who volunteered to work on this project as part of their Honours research essay. A senior field manager was present in the field at all times. In Groblersdal, assistance with fieldwork was provided by Ndlovu Care Centre whereby Ndlovu Care Group identified eight fieldworkers from the Moutse

area to work together with the Centre for Social Development in Africa (CSDA) fieldwork team. The local police, ward councillors and community organisations afforded the fieldworkers access to the areas under study.

The data were captured in excel and imported into SPSS for cleaning and analysis. Descriptive analyses, predominantly in the form of frequencies and cross tabulations, were used to describe the findings. Inferential statistics, predominantly chi-squared analyses (using the Pearson Chi-squared test) and linear regression analysis were used to report significant (primarily bivariate) associations between variables and to build a regression model incorporating all variables where respondents differed significantly by their political affiliation. All associations reported are statistically significant at $p < .05$ and at a 95 per cent confidence level.

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

The focus of this study was on voting behaviour in poor communities, since formal social protection policies in South Africa are targeted at those who are unable to support themselves and their dependents. The study was therefore conducted in three areas with high levels of poverty. The profile of the respondents presented in Table 1 underscores the levels of income poverty in these areas.

It should be highlighted that across the three areas, only 28 per cent of respondents reported being employed either full-time or part-time. It is therefore not surprising that a majority of respondents (72 per cent) reported receiving no income from working. Eleven per cent earn under R2,500 a month, while only 5 per cent of respondents indicated that they earn R8,000 or more per month.

Levels of education are relatively low across the three areas, with an average of 40 per cent of respondents having completed secondary school or accessed further skills training or tertiary education.

In addition to the socio-demographic profile of respondents, the extent to which they are accessing social grants is also an important aspect of describing the sample. Although social protection policies are far broader than the provision of social grants alone, much attention has been given to the well-established and targeted social grant system in South Africa as a large proportion of social spending goes towards social grants. The social grant system provides regular income to vulnerable households and is the government's most direct measure for reducing poverty. These means-

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Characteristics	Riverlea N (%)	Doornkop N (%)	Groblersdal N (%)	Total N (%)
Gender				
Male	203 (50.5%)	191 (48%)	198 (49.5%)	529 (49%)
Female	199 (49.5%)	211 (52%)	202 (50.5%)	612 (51%)
Total	402 (100%)	402 (100%)	400 (100%)	1204 (100%)
Income				
No income from work	260 (65%)	277 (69%)	325 (81%)	862 (72%)
Grant				
At least one grant (individual)	121(30%)	165(41%)	168(42%)	454(38%)
Age				
18-34 yrs	186 (47%)	205(51%)	201(51%)	592(49%)
35+ yrs	215 (53%)	197(49%)	199(49%)	611(51%)
Total	401(100%)	402(100%)	400(100%)	1203(100%)
Race				
Black	230 (57%)	396 (99%)	399 (100%)	1025 (85%)
Coloured	163 (41%)	2 (>1%)	1 (<1%)	166 (14%)
Indian/Asian	3 (>1%)	1 (>1%)	0 (0%)	4 (<1%)
White	2 (>1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (<1%)
Other	4 (1%)	3 (>1%)	0 (0%)	7 (1%)
Total	402(100%)	402 (100%)	400 (100%)	1204 (100%)
Education				
Not completed secondary school	214 (53%)	240 (60%)	271 (68%)	725 (60%)
Completed secondary school or more	188 (47%)	161 (40%)	129 (32%)	478 (40%)
Total	402(100%)	401 (100%)	400 (100%)	1203 (100%)

tested cash transfers are provided by the government to groups in need such as the elderly, children of low-income care-givers, those who cannot work due to a disability, and war veterans of a certain age who cannot support themselves. At present there is no direct grant support for able-bodied unemployed adults through the social grant system.

As shown in the table above, an overall total of 38 per cent of respondents received at least one social grant. The most common grant received is the Child Support Grant (CSG, 25 per cent), followed by the Old Age Grant (10 per cent) and then the Disability Grant (4 per cent). This follows the national trends (South African Social Security Agency 2014). In addition, it was also useful to know not only how many individual respondents received a grant, but also how many respondents lived in households where at least one person was receiving a grant. This gives an indication of the broader reach of social grants in these areas. It was found that more than half (58 per cent) of households received at least one grant, while 42 per cent of households received no grants.

Knowledge and perceptions of rights in South Africa's democracy

Before testing whether or not there is a link between social grants and voting behaviour, it was necessary to ascertain what the respondents knew about their democratic rights, particularly with regard to their socio-economic rights as these form the basis of social protection policies.

In a democracy, it is important that the citizens understand that their rights are intrinsic to that democracy (that is, irrespective of the party in power). Awareness (or lack thereof) of such rights has implications for voting behaviour (as well as voter and civic education). In South Africa, the progressive Constitution guarantees not only political rights, such as the right to vote, the right to protest, and a range of freedoms, but also a vast array of socio-economic rights where the most vulnerable and poor in society are guaranteed social protection. According to the Know Your Constitution Campaign,⁵ 'the majority of South Africans continue to be unaware of their constitutional rights and/or how these rights apply to the persistent inequalities surrounding them' (*Daily Maverick* November 5, 2013).

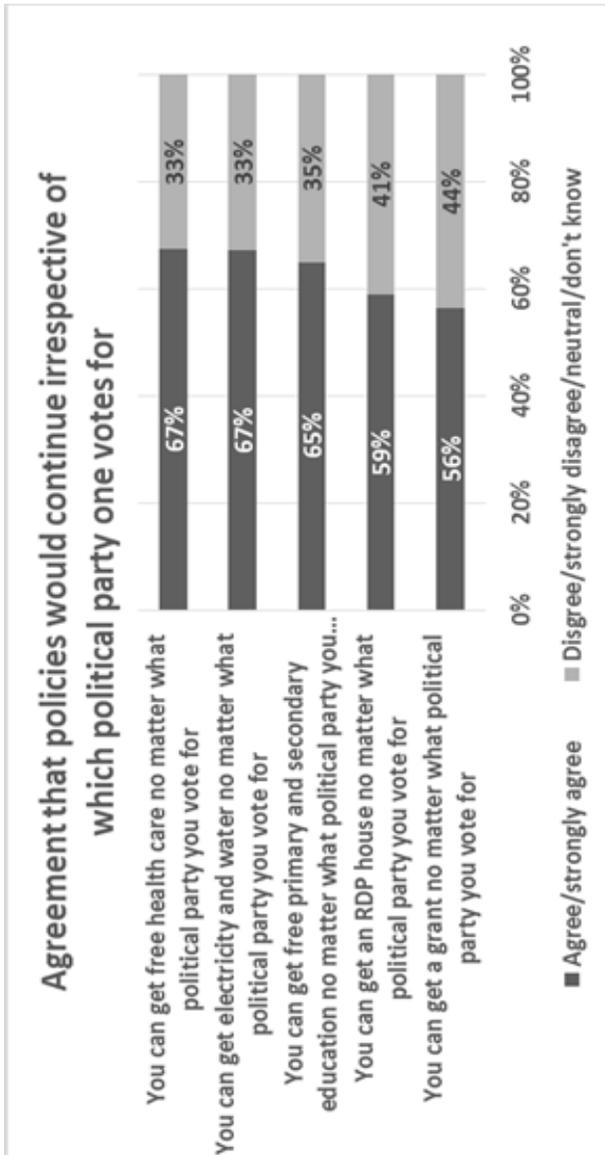
The results show that respondents are aware of their rights in a democracy. Upon being presented with a list of seven socio-economic and political rights, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed

that these are their rights in a democracy, using a rating scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).⁶ More than 80 per cent are aware of their political rights such as the freedom to give their opinions (88 per cent) and the right to protest (81 per cent), while more than 90 per cent of respondents agreed (or strongly agreed) that in a democracy one has a right to basic education, access to healthcare, food and water, the freedom to practice one's own religion and beliefs, social security such as grants (92 per cent agreed or strongly agreed with this statement) and adequate housing. It was also found that grant recipients are more likely than non-recipients to strongly agree that these are their rights in a democracy. In addition, respondents living in the urban areas of Riverlea and Doornkop are more likely than those living in the more rural Groblersdal area to strongly agree that these are their rights in a democracy.⁷

Despite this high level of awareness of socio-economic rights, respondents were less certain as to whether these rights would be protected irrespective of which political party they voted for. When the ANC assumed power following the first democratic elections in 1994, the government introduced a range of social protection policies and minimum standards linked to a social wage that aimed at realising these socio-economic rights and providing a safety net for the poor. In addition to the social grants, the social protection system included, among other aspects: free health care for pregnant women and children under six years of age; free basic services such as electricity and water for poor households; subsidised housing for poor households; and subsidised and free education (according to ability to pay) (NPC 2011).

Using the same scale as noted above, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that these rights would be protected if another political party came to power. As shown in Figure 1, the majority agreed (or strongly agreed) that the policies through which the government realises these rights would continue irrespective of which political party they voted for, but overall the levels of certainty were lower than for the awareness of these rights discussed above. For example, compared to two thirds (67 per cent) who agreed that free health care policies would continue no matter which political party they voted for in an election, only 56 per cent of respondents agreed that grants would continue no matter which party they vote for. This finding may suggest that there is a disjuncture between voters knowing, on the one hand, that social protection is guaranteed in the Constitution and, on the other hand, believing that this right will actually continue in practice should parties in government change. The

Figure 1: Levels of agreement that policies would continue irrespective of which political party respondents intend to vote for



implication of course is that voters may choose to vote for the party currently in power in order to be 'assured' a continued receipt of grants. However, there may be other reasons such as the perception by grant beneficiaries of the partisanship of public officials who administer the grants. The reasons were not probed in the study and further qualitative research might cast greater light on why 44 per cent of respondents did not agree with the statement. However, it is important that voters know that their Constitutional rights cannot be taken away no matter what party choice they make on election day; this is where increased civic and voter education could help to assuage people's fears.

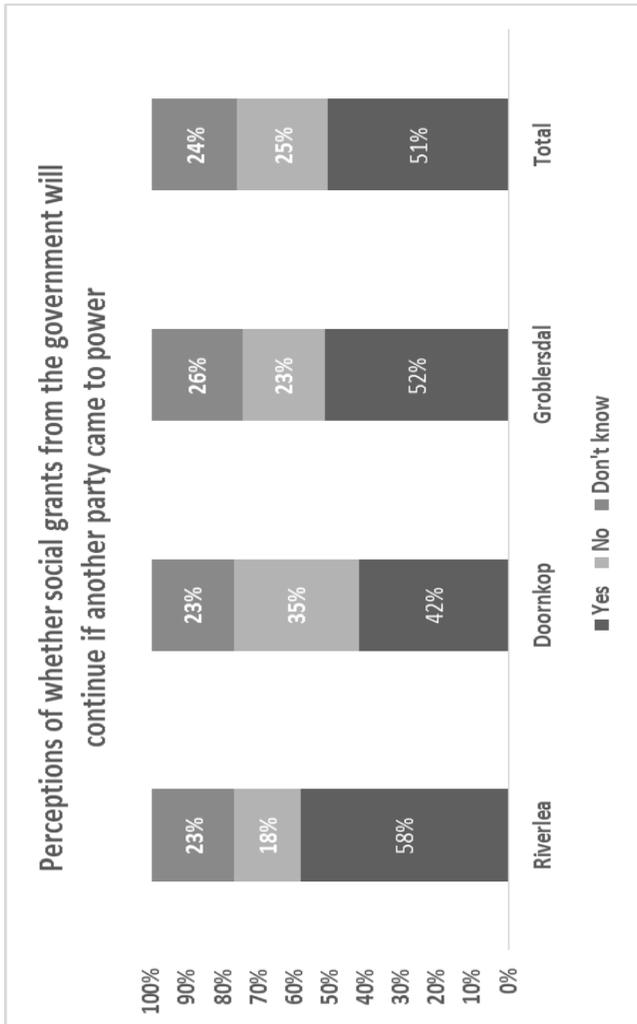
Some associations were found between strong agreement with the protection of rights and voting intention, race and area. Although both opposition and ruling party supporters agreed, the former (34 per cent) were more likely than the latter (25 per cent) to strongly agree that these rights would be protected if another political party came into power. Black African respondents (27 per cent) were less likely than other race groups (36 per cent) to strongly agree that these rights would be protected if another political party came into power. Respondents from the rural area of Groblersdal (34 per cent) were more likely than those from the two urban areas (26 per cent) to strongly agree that these rights would be protected if another political party came into power.

Because of the interest in the influence of social grants in particular on voting behaviour, an additional direct question was posed focusing solely on grants. When asked specifically about the continuation of social grants, those who received a grant and those who intended voting for the ruling party were least certain that grants would continue if another party came into power. Overall, just over half of the respondents (51 per cent) agreed that social grants from the government would continue if another political party came to power (see Figure 2). Respondents in Doornkop (42 per cent) were least likely to believe that social grants would continue; 58 per cent of respondents in Riverlea and 52 per cent in Groblersdal believed this would be the case.

Worryingly, 49 per cent were unsure or did not think that social grants would continue if another party came to power. As with the previous finding, the provision of social grants could provide an incentive for people to continue voting for the ANC as they feel they have more assurance of receiving grants if they do. Moreover, such uncertainty among the voting public suggests possible manipulation by the ruling party during

electioneering. This certainly appeared to be the case when, as mentioned earlier, Kwazulu-Natal MEC Meshack Radebe referred to those who received social welfare grants but voted for opposition political parties as ‘stealing from government’.

Figure 2: Perceptions of whether social grants would continue if another political party came to power, by area



The influence of social protection (social grants) on voting behaviour

A key aim of this study was to explore how social protection policies – and more specifically, social grants – influence how poor people vote and, if so, in what ways. In the section above, it was noted that the respondents were aware of their socio-economic and political rights in a democracy, but were less sure that these rights, realised through the social protection policies, would be protected should another political party come to power. An association was found between perceptions of whether or not social protection policies would continue irrespective of which party respondents' vote for, and respondents' electoral choice (see Figure 3).

Across all five statements, it was found that those who indicated that they intended to vote for an opposition party were more likely to believe that these policies would continue. This was most evident with regard to social grants with 70 per cent of respondents who intended to vote for an opposition party feeling that social grants would continue under another party, while 48 per cent of those who supported the ruling party believed that this would be the case.

Much of the debate on the influence of social protection policies on voting behaviour revolves around the role of social grants in particular, therefore the rest of this section will focus on social grants. In considering how social grants may influence voting behaviour, it is useful to understand the general perceptions of social grants in these areas. Two questions were asked in this study to explore these perceptions: (1) Do social grants help poor people to survive; and (2) Do social grants make people not want to work? (see Figure 4).

Firstly, the majority of respondents (88 per cent) overwhelmingly agreed that social grants 'help poor people to survive'. Grant recipients (91 per cent) were slightly more likely to agree with this statement than those who did not receive grants (86 per cent), but in both cases the majority of respondents agree that grants play an important role in supporting those who are unable to support themselves. This finding far outweighed the 33 per cent of respondents who agreed that social grants discourage people from working (37 per cent compared to 26 per cent).

Figure 3: Agreement that rights will be protected if another party comes to power, by electoral choice

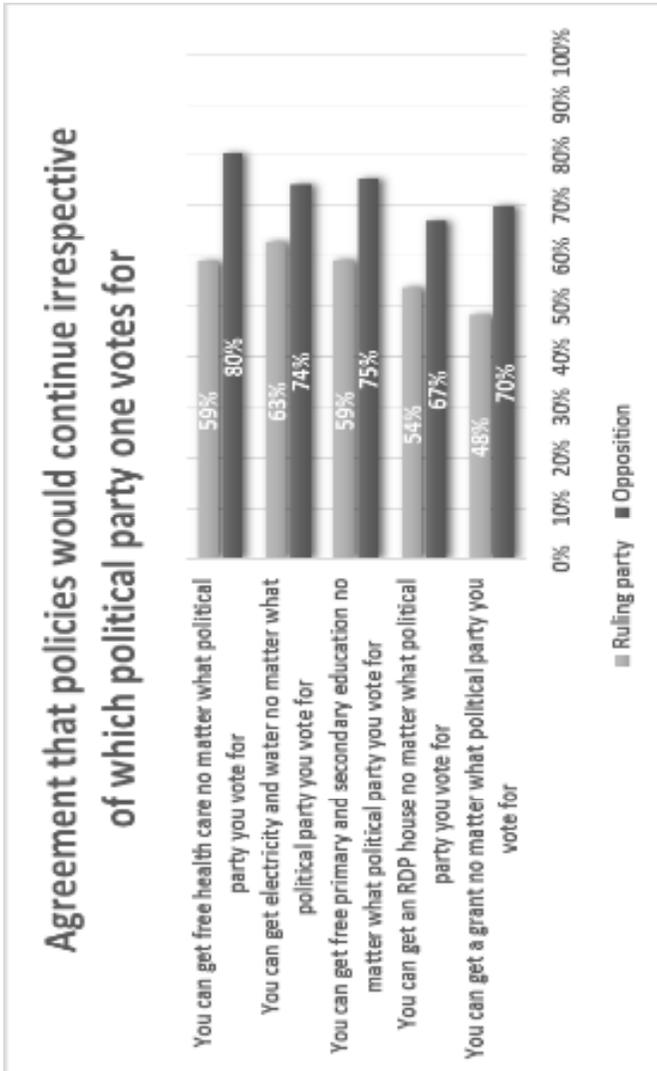
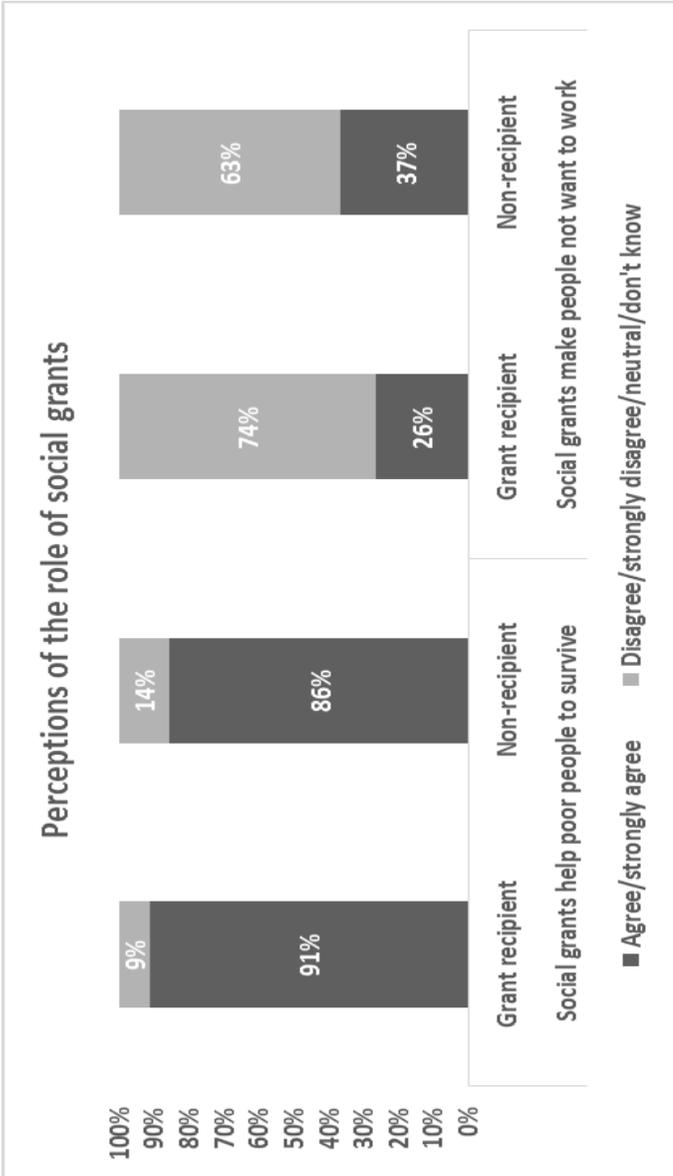


Figure 4: Perceptions of social grants, by grant receipt



For both of these statements there was an association with electoral choice. Supporters of the ruling party were more likely than those who intended voting for an opposition party to agree that social grants help poor people survive (92 per cent compared to 80 per cent) and slightly less likely to agree that grants discourage work (32 per cent compared to 39 per cent).

When comparing respondents' responses on these two statements, it was found that most of those (70 per cent) who believe that grants help the poor to survive did not agree that grants discourage working (or were neutral about the statement). However, the other 30 per cent did agree that grants discourage people from working, reflecting their ambivalence about the role of grants in society. Of those who did not agree that grants help the poor survive (or felt neutral about the protective role of grants), more than half (55 per cent) believed that grants discourage work.

The role of social grants and food parcels in choosing support for a party

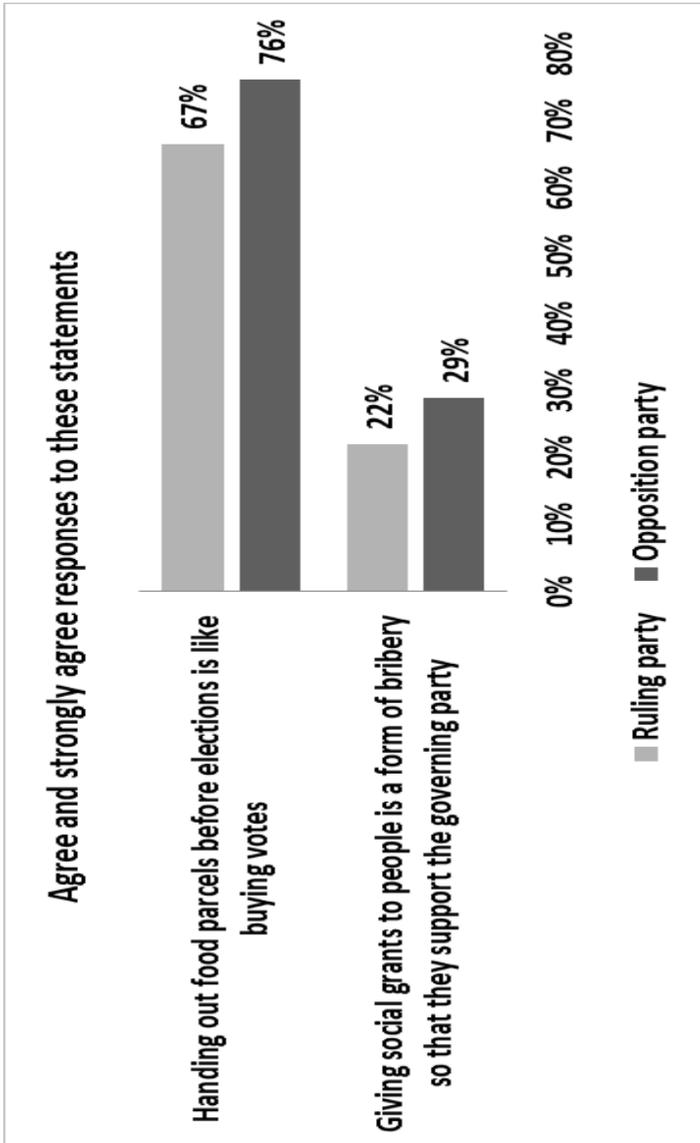
Patronage, or clientelism, as mentioned above, can be an important determinant of voting behaviour (Bratton and van de Walle 1997, van de Walle 2003). In a clientelistic relationship politicians tend to use their power to provide economic privileges or other material favours to voters in return for their political support at the polls (Wantchekon 2003, Stokes 2007, Vicente and Wantchekon 2009, Szwarcberg 2013). As noted previously, in South African public conversation, the distribution of social grants by government has been likened to vote-buying. However, unlike in clientelistic relationships where privileges or favours are provided to particular groups in return for political support, grants are provided to those deemed eligible on the basis of clear eligibility criteria and a means test that is applied to all applicants. Similarly, there are clear procedures for the assessment of need in the distribution of food parcels as another form of social assistance in times of crisis. However, concerns have been raised that the distribution of food parcels prior to elections may in some instances take the form of 'undue influence' in persuading people to vote for the party providing the food. Two key negative implications of such actions are that, firstly, these actions subvert the core democratic principle that every voter is entitled to exercise his or her vote freely without undue pressure; and, secondly, distributing food parcels could be construed to amount to acts of bribery and corruption which undermine the legitimacy of the electoral process.⁸

In order to address this aspect of voting behaviour, as well as the notion that grants are also attempts at ‘buying the vote’, respondents were asked directly about their perceptions of the role of grants and food parcels in relation to voting. Most respondents (76 per cent) did not agree with (or were neutral about) the statement, ‘Giving social grants to people is a form of bribery so that they support the governing party’. Both grant recipients and non-grant recipients were of similar minds on this point. With regard to food parcels in particular, more than two thirds of respondents across the three poor communities (70 per cent) agreed that handing out food parcels before elections was ‘like buying votes’. There was an association with electoral choice (see Figure 5), with supporters of opposition parties (76 per cent) being more likely than those who support the ruling party (67 per cent) to view the handing out of food parcels before elections as a form of vote-buying. This indicates that most voters in poor communities disapprove of this practice before an election. One could therefore argue that it is highly unlikely that the majority of poor voters will be persuaded to vote for a particular party on the basis of receiving food parcels before elections.

Therefore, despite some mixed views about whether or not grants discourage work, most respondents did not view grants as a means of vote-buying. However, many did regard handing out food parcels prior to an election as a form of vote-buying. Despite the majority being of this view, importantly, 27 per cent of respondents reported that they would be likely to vote for a political party because the party gave food parcels before elections. This suggests that a portion of the voting population can be potentially ‘bought’, especially in local government elections when parties are close in terms of support.

To tap more directly into whether or not social grants play a role in influencing voting choices, respondents were asked if they would vote for a party because ‘the party provides social grants for households like yours’. Out of all of the reasons listed for why respondents would vote 59 per cent of respondents agreed that they would vote for a party for this reason, while two thirds (65 per cent) agreed that they would vote for a party because the party ‘promises to look after households like (theirs)’. Those who received a grant (65 per cent) were more likely to agree that they would vote for a party that provides social grants than those who did not receive a grant (56 per cent).

Figure 5: Agreements with statements relating to voting for a party based on potential benefits, by party preference



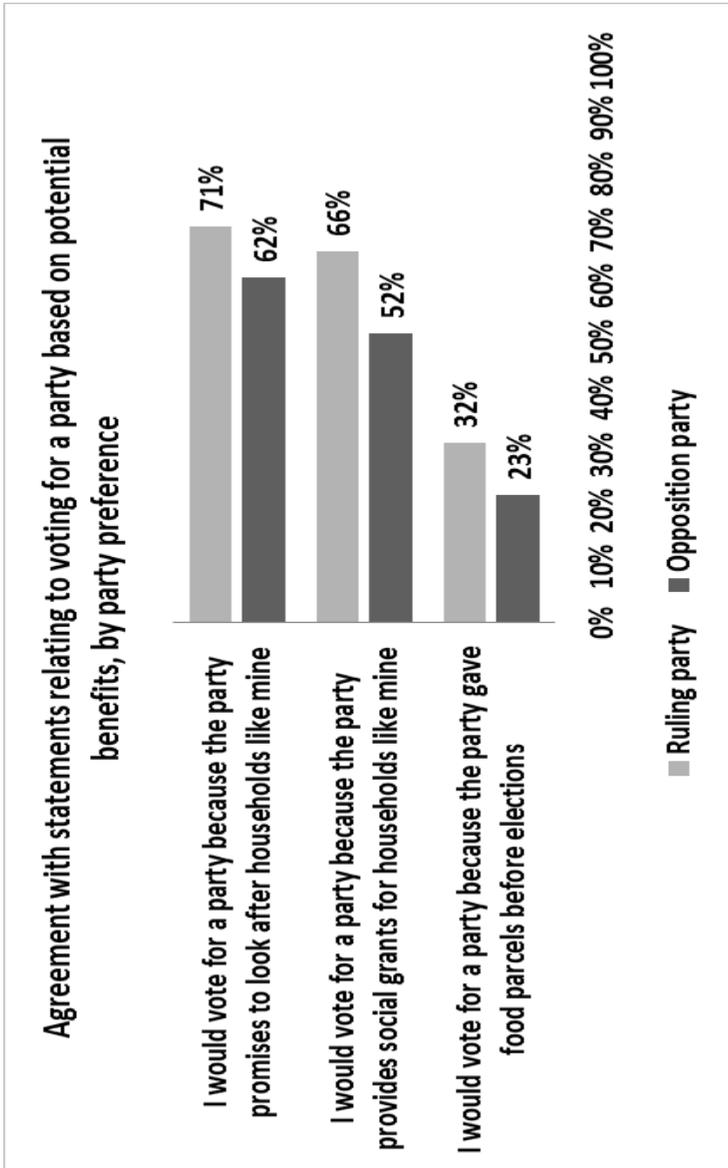
The following figure (Figure 6) reports those who agree or strongly agree (ratings 4 and 5) with the three statements relating to support for a party based on the potential benefits for respondents and their households, by the respondents' electoral choice.

Overall, two thirds (65 per cent) agreed that they would vote for a party because the party promises to look after households like theirs, while 59 per cent said they would vote for a party because the party provides social grants for households like theirs. An association was also found between agreement with these statements and party preference. Those who would vote for the ruling party (66 per cent) were more likely than those who intended voting for an opposition party (52 per cent) to agree that they would vote for a party that provides social grants. Ruling party supporters were more likely than opposition party supporters to vote for a party because the party promises to look after them, the party provides social grants, or the party handed out food parcels before elections.

When comparing how grant recipients and non-recipients intended to vote in the 2014 elections, it was found that there was no clear association with grant receipt. When grouping together those who would vote for an opposition party, and comparing them with those who intend to vote for the ruling party, and those who were undecided (see Figure 7), it appeared that a higher proportion of grant recipients (67 per cent) than non-recipients (59 per cent) intended to vote for the ruling party, although this association was not statistically significant. However, when only those who indicated their party preference were included (and those who responded that they 'don't know' were excluded), a significant association was found. This relationship warrants further exploration in future research as the 10 per cent of respondents who indicated that they don't know who they intend to vote for represent the difference between a significant and a non-significant relationship between grant receipt and voting choice. However, social grant receipt is only one of several factors that influence voting behaviour.

Linear regression⁹ analysis was used to explain and predict respondents' electoral choice using the variables which measured potential clientelist based voting. The results revealed that those who agreed that giving social grants to people is a form of bribery and agreed that handing out food parcels is like buying votes, are statistically less likely to vote for the ANC. The results further revealed that those who agreed that people vote because the party gives food parcels before elections are statistically less likely to vote for the ANC. Those that agreed that people vote because the party

Figure 6: Agreements with statements relating to voting for a party based on potential benefits, by party preference



‘promises to look after households like yours’ are also statistically more likely to vote for the ANC. Finally, those that agreed that people vote because the party provides social grants are statistically more likely to vote for the ANC. In the linear regression, receipt of grants was not a significant predictor of who a respondent would vote for.

Social grants and food parcels vs other explanations of voting behaviour

When the significant variables in the clientelism model were added to the overall model¹⁰ containing the statistically significant contributions from the four conceptual models, the clientelistic factors were not significant. As indicated by the significance and odds ratios presented in Table 2 below, the largest contributing factor in predicting voting behaviour in these communities is race, followed by party identification which is indicated by feelings of closeness to one party only, and party loyalty, measured as those who have never considered voting for another party. Thereafter the combined rational choice reasons for voting for a party, that is those who agree that they would vote because they have known the party for a long time, they trust the party, the party has good strong leaders, and the party brought freedom and democracy to South Africans contributed to the overall model. The fifth largest contributing factor is the extent to which respondents feel that their rights would be protected (or that the programmes put in place to realise their rights would continue) if another party came to power. Thereafter the rating of the government’s performance and perceptions of corruption in government (rational choice factors) contributed significantly. Age, trust in the government, perceived vote-buying behaviour and reasons for voting relating to clientelism were not statistically significant.

Conclusion

The main focus of this article was on the role of social protection and food parcels in voting behaviour in three poor South African communities. However, it is important to state that multiple factors were found to influence how people vote. Race, party identification, party loyalty, rational choice reasons for voting, beliefs about the protection of rights, ratings of government’s performance and perceptions of corruption were all significant predictors of voting behaviour.

Table 2: Overall regression predicting the likelihood of voting for the ruling party

Factors	B	SE	Wald	Df	Sig.	Odds Ratio
Race	-2.401	0.466	26.581	1	.000	0.09
Party identification	1.741	0.413	17.771	1	.000	5.70
Party loyalty	1.322	0.375	12.39	1	.000	3.75
Rational choice reasons for voting	0.994	0.389	6.537	1	.011	2.70
Perceptions on protection of rights	-0.943	0.279	11.424	1	.001	0.39
Government performance	0.91	0.383	5.64	1	.018	2.49
Perceptions of corruption in government	-0.832	0.317	6.884	1	.009	0.44
Age	-0.259	0.385	0.455	1	.500	0.77
Trust in government	0.432	0.483	0.8	1	.371	1.54
Perceived vote-buying behaviour	-0.163	0.27	0.365	1	.546	0.85
Reasons for voting related to clientelism	0.196	0.215	0.834	1	.361	1.22
Constant	-1.483	2.751	0.29	1	.590	0.2

In this study it was found that the protection of social and economic rights emerged as a concern for respondents. While the majority of grant recipients and non-recipients were aware that they have a Constitutional right to social assistance, almost half of the respondents were nevertheless still unsure or did not believe that this right would be protected should another political party come to power. In a situation where one party has dominated the electoral scene for such a long time, and without having the experience of other parties being in power, it is difficult for voters to 'know' whether these benefits will continue under a different party in power, and this could provide an incentive for voting for the ruling party. Thus, while people may be aware of their constitutional rights on paper, they are less certain about the guarantee of these rights in practice.

In regard to whether social grants influence voting behaviour and

electoral choice in particular, it was found that grant receipt has some influence in how people vote but that it is not a driving factor. However, it is also suggested that social grants can be used as a successful campaign strategy by the ruling party, since the majority of grant-holders do not think that they will continue receiving a grant when a new party comes to power.

On the question of whether people would vote for a party that provides grants for households like theirs, 59 per cent were more likely to agree with this statement than non-recipients (65 per cent of grant recipients compared to 56 per cent of non-recipients). On the question of which political party respondents would vote for, there was no clear statistical association between getting a grant and respondents' electoral choice when those who did not know who they would vote for were included. When the influence of grants is considered along with other factors, it was not a strong predictor of how people in these areas would vote. Instead, perceptions of the protection of social rights featured more strongly.

While the majority of respondents did not regard the provision of social grants as vote-buying, a very large majority did regard the handing out of food parcels before elections as a form of bribery or 'vote-buying'. This suggests a healthy understanding of or respect for the democratic electoral process; however, it is important to reiterate that over a quarter of respondents indicated they would vote for a party that gave them food parcels, therefore the potential to 'buy' votes is still a possibility.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that, at this stage, the findings are not definitive and further research is required in terms of a more nationally representative sample.

Notes

1. This was a joint study by the authors and the Centre for Social Development in Africa (CSDA), University of Johannesburg. We would like to acknowledge and thank Kim Baldry for her input on this article.
2. Relative poverty means that the poverty line is adjusted each year according to the cost of living, and varies depending on the number of people living in a household. In 2012 this ranged from R1,450 (\$145 per month to R5,157 (\$515) for a household of eight. Of those living in poverty 41.9 per cent are African, 24.5 per cent are coloured, 11.1 per cent are Indian and 0.8 per cent are white (SAIRR 2013: 343).
3. In another example, according to the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy In Africa (EISA, 2014: 22), the DA stated that in a period of a year (2013-2014)

Sassa had distributed food parcels in 23 wards where by-elections were going to be held, and that 'more than 23 000 food parcels were distributed across the wards'.

4. This figure was calculated according to the formula: $n = \pi (1 - \pi)z^2/D^2$, where n corresponds to the sample size, π corresponds to the proportion of the targeted groups within the population, D corresponds to the sample precision, and z equals 1.96. This formula enabled the project leaders to calculate the sample size with the smallest margin of error and ensure that the sample was representative of the generalized population
5. The Know Your Constitution campaign is a coalition of civil society organisations united by a common belief in the importance of access to constitutions and constitutional literacy. It includes the Constitutional Literacy and Service Initiative, The Socio-Economic Rights Institute, SECTION27, Constitution Hill Education Project and Afrika Tikkun.
6. Scale: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree, 6=don't know.
7. A related finding, pertaining to how politically aware respondents are, indicated that across the three communities sampled, 94 per cent of respondents acquire information about what is going on in the country at least twice a week across the various media platforms (in Riverlea and Doornkop, 96 per cent of respondents acquire information about current and political affairs at least twice a week, while this was only slightly lower in Groblersdal at 90 per cent.) Although the quality or content of the news they are accessing was not assessed, it is clear that these respondents do have regular access to news. This is important as there have been suggestions that particularly poor voters in South Africa, are uninformed and vote primarily along racial lines without consideration for party performance. These findings would therefore suggest that far from being uninformed or politically unaware, these poor voters have a potentially high level of awareness of current events in the country.
8. It is important at this point just to add that the distribution of food parcels by political parties is not an unusual occurrence, happening often even in Western democracies (known through the derogatory phrase 'pork barrel politics'). However, an issue arises when a ruling party uses government funding (that is, tax payer's money) to fund the food parcels as opposed to using their own private funding.
9. The assumptions of binary logistic regression were assessed and outliers were removed prior to the analyses. Where multicollinearity was observed, one of the correlated predictor variables was dropped from the analysis.
10. The overall model containing all predictors was statistically significant, $X^2(1, N=345) = 115.68, p < .001$. With these factors the model explained between 32.6 percent and 53.1 percent of the variation in the voting choice of respondents,

that is, whether respondents intended to vote for the ruling party or for an opposition party. The overall model is a strong predictor of whether a respondent will vote for the ruling party, with 94.3 percent cases correctly classified for the ruling party and 52.4 percent of cases correctly classified for the opposition parties.

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