



# **COMPARING ELECTION PROJECTIONS WITH THE REAL THING**

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**T**he 2004 election has come and gone. Four hundred new or returning MPs have taken their seats in the National Assembly for the next five years. The main feature of the political composition of parliament remains unchanged, with the ruling African National Congress (ANC) increasing its numerical dominance from 266 to 279 seats.

Much of the media focus was on the demise of the New National Party (NNP) as its supporters deserted en masse for the Democratic Alliance (DA), the ANC and the infant Independent Democrats (ID).

One surprise was the relatively high ultimate turnout of 15.9 million voters, almost 77% of the 20.7 million registered voters. Nevertheless, this comprises less than 60% of adult South Africans who are eligible to register and vote, a proportion which – by our third election – starts to close on that in the longer established democracies.

A concern for future turn-out was the disappointingly low proportion of eligible newcomers to the franchise, i.e. the 18- to 19-year-old bracket, who registered in preparation to vote: less than a third.

One of the earliest public projections of the outcome of the election



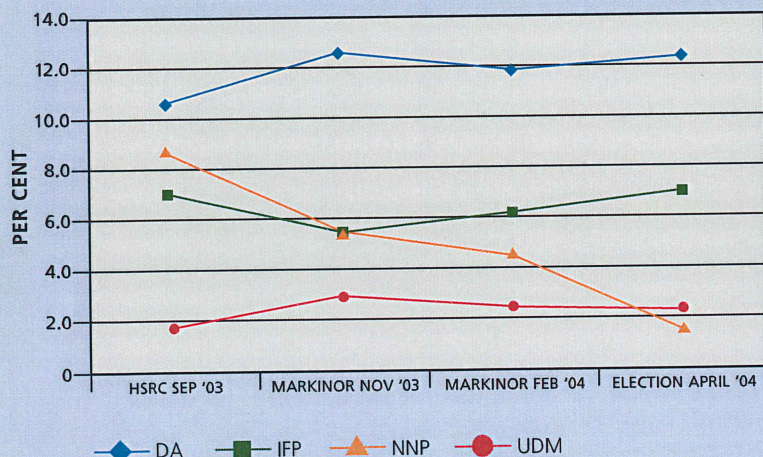
was that made by the HSRC in November 2003, on the basis of its South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS), for which the field-work was done in September–October. Despite the considerable seven months' lead time, the main predictions were not far off the mark.

Using discriminant analysis to predict the voting behaviour of survey respondents who did not declare their intentions, the HSRC made a forecast that the ANC would win 67.8% of votes cast, followed at some distance by the DA with 10.5%. The ultimate figures were 69.7% and 12.3%.

This statistical technique used the biographical characteristics of SASAS respondents who indicated the party for which they intended to vote, to impute the probable votes of the one-third (33%) of SASAS respondents who chose not to reveal their voting intentions. The proportion of these 'undeclareds' was only 28% amongst black Africans, but was much higher for the other groups: coloured 45%, white 50%, Indian 60%.

The chief variations between the HSRC's imputed predictions and the final results arose from the late and rapid shift of allegiance away from the NNP, in the months of run-up to the election. This downward trajectory of NNP support was itself quite well tracked by successive public opinion surveys following the HSRC's initial reading (8.7%): notably by Markinor in November 2003 (5.5%) and February 2004 (4.5%). Markinor applied similar imputation techniques to yield their results. By the election in April, the NNP ended up with only 1.7% of votes cast. The graph displays the almost linear downward trend of NNP support identified by these successive surveys.

**SURVEYS OVER TIME VS ELECTION: MINORITY PARTIES**



Apart from the ANC and DA, the other major beneficiary of this trend was the ID, which at 1.7% emerged with significantly more than the HSRC's predicted 0.4%.

The Inkatha Freedom Party won precisely the number of seats predicted by the HSRC, indicative of the power of discriminant analysis in detecting the strongly distinctive rural isiZulu-speaking support base for this party. The African Christian Democratic Party and Freedom Front Plus performed better than their predicted outcomes, but at these low support-levels predictions are expected to be tentative. The table compares the September predictions with the outcome seven months later, in terms of seats.

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Political party	HSRC prediction from SASAS, September 2003 survey	Actual election result, April 2004
ANC	271	279
DA	42	50
IFP	28	28
NNP	35	7
UDM	7	9
PAC	2	3
AZAPO	2	2
FF+	2	4
ACDP	2	6
ID	2	7
UCDP	2	3
MF	1	2
AEB	1	0
Other	3	0

Stephen Rule, April 2004

## VOTER SATISFACTION

The HSRC, in collaboration with Markinor, was commissioned by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to conduct interviews with 14 227 voters emerging from voting stations on 14 April. They made the encouraging finding that more than 98% of voters were satisfied that election procedures had been 'free and fair'. The Independent Electoral Commission was able to announce this at the same time as the finalisation of the election results, less than three days after the closing of voting stations. Further findings from the study will be released shortly.

Queues of voters varied in length between voting stations and at different times of the day during field trips between stations. At schools in Soweto's Pimville and Orlando East, the queues amounted to several hundred before 9:00a.m. on Election Day. At Johannesburg's Yeoville Recreation Centre more than 800 were waiting to vote at 10:00a.m. and at least 300 at Bakerton, Springs, at 1:00p.m.

By mid-afternoon in Leandra, the queue stood at about 80 and there were only a handful by 5:00p.m. at the Newcastle Farmer's Hall. In contrast, Sesiabonga High School at Osizweni, KwaZulu-Natal, still had a queue of about 200 waiting patiently in the dark at 7:00p.m. •

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DR OLIVE SHISANA

# ELECTION FORECASTS VS THE REALITY

