South Africa's 2024 General Election
Political Uncertainty, Infrastructure Challenges, and Security Risks

Prepared by
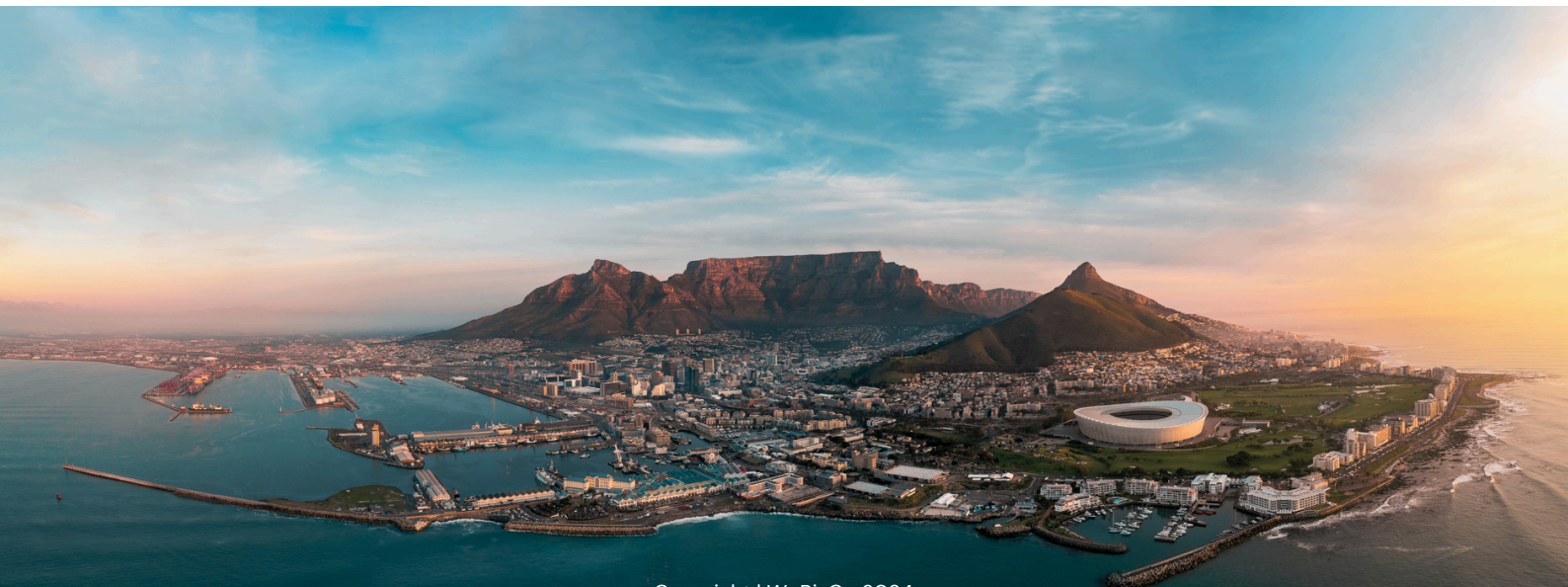
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Executive Summary

- On 29 May, South Africa's General election is scheduled to take place amidst an ongoing energy crisis, violent crime, and high levels of unemployment.
- Four main political parties are participating in this election, the African National Congress (ANC), the Democratic Alliance (DA), the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), and the uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK).
- The upcoming elections pose various risks, including the potential for election-related violence. These risks encompass sporadic acts of violence like looting, rioting, and vandalism, alongside political violence.
- Levels of political violence will remain high ahead of the vote, with criminal groups expected to continue targeting electoral candidates and polling officials, especially in rural provinces.
- Civil unrest and potential political violence could likely occur pre and post-election. This often includes road blockades, looting, and other disruption. Clashes between various youth groups, mainly the ANC and the DA and violence by criminal groups near polling sites cannot be ruled out; however, they are unlikely to target voters.
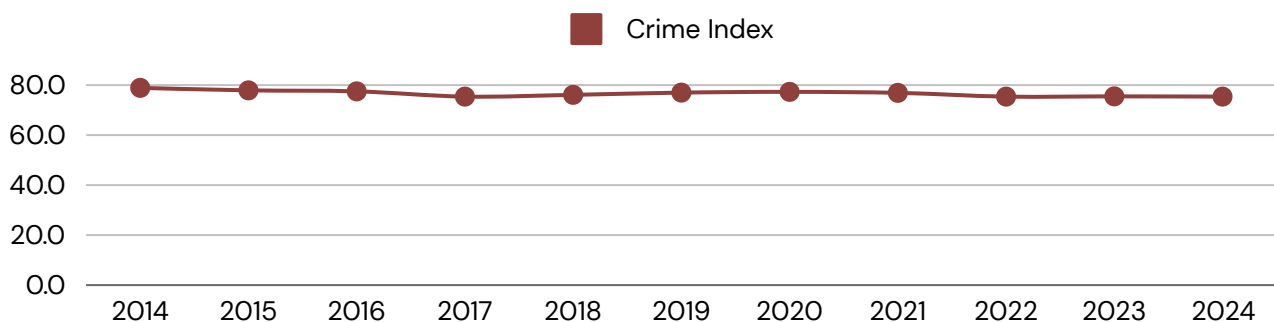
Introduction

On 29 May 2024, nearly 28 million South African registered voters will take part in general elections in South Africa to elect representatives to the national and provincial parliaments, amidst significant economic, social, and political challenges.. Historically, the African National Congress (ANC) has been the dominant party since the end of apartheid in 1992. However, the ANC is currently facing a decline in voter support, which is estimated to be around 40%. This erosion of the ANC's voter base is attributed to persistent governance challenges, corruption scandals, deteriorating infrastructure, and economic disillusionment. The decline in ANC's popularity signals a potential shift towards coalition politics, with the party seeking alliances with other political parties contesting the election.
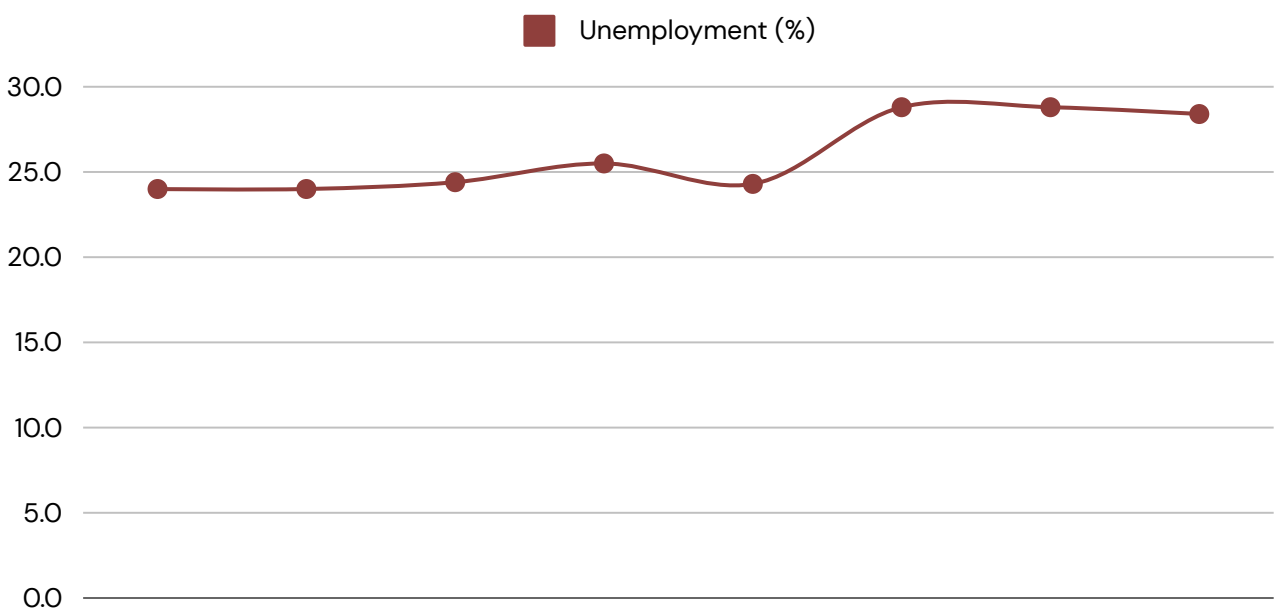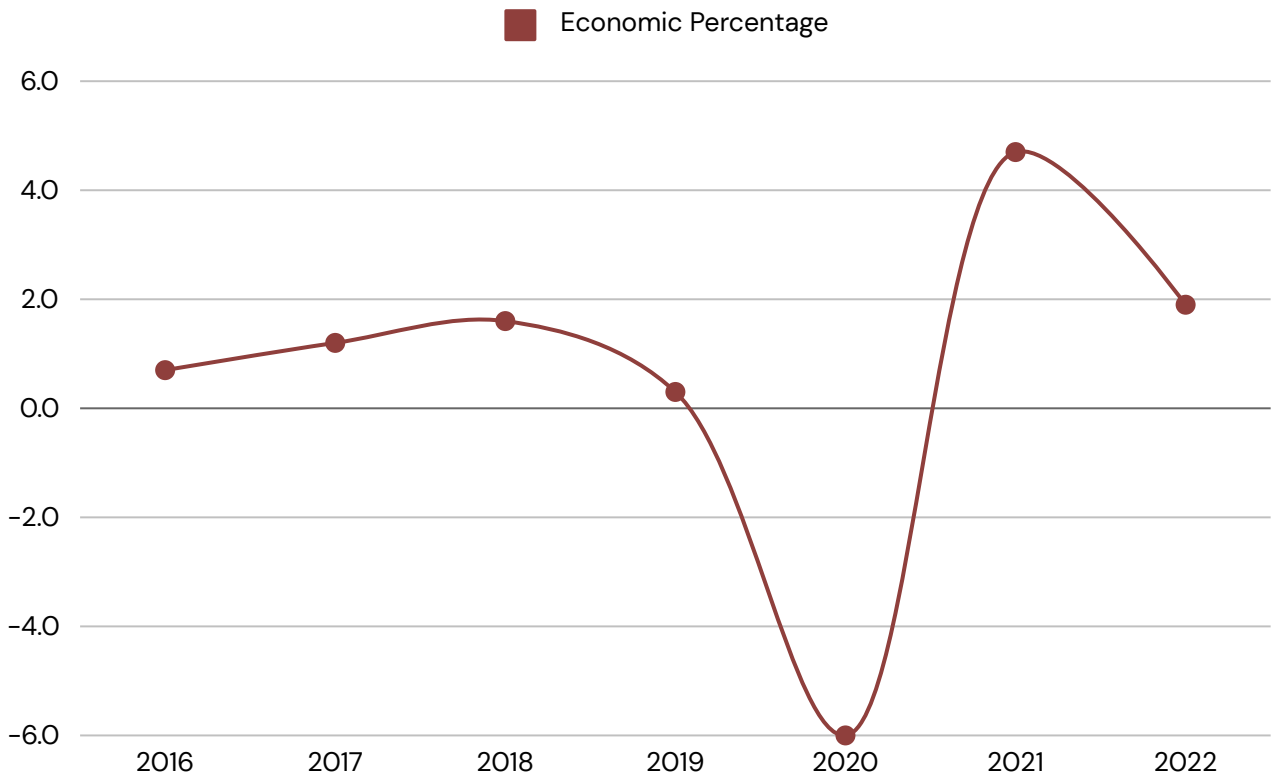

Key Political Parties

- **African National Congress (ANC)**: Facing a pivotal moment in its electoral history, the ANC seeks to consolidate alliances to maintain governance. President Cyril Ramaphosa's leadership confronts internal strife and external challenges, necessitating strategic manoeuvers to retain relevance.

- **Democratic Alliance (DA)**: As the second-largest party, the DA holds sway in the Western Cape and advances a comprehensive 'rescue plan' addressing unemployment, crime, corruption, and economic revitalization. Its potential coalition with the ANC could reshape South Africa's political landscape.

- **Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF):** A vocal advocate for economic justice and radical reform, the EFF under Julius Malema's leadership continues to gain traction among disillusioned voters, particularly in urban centres and townships.

- **uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK)**: Jacob Zuma's new political vehicle, MK, emerges as a disruptive force in KwaZulu-Natal, challenging ANC's stronghold in the region and attracting disaffected ANC loyalists. The important challenge faced by the party is the leader and former president of South Africa Zacon Zumba is ruled out from contesting the election due to 2021 contempt of court conviction

Issues Impacting Voter Sentiments

- **Infrastructure Crisis:** Persistent power shortages (load-shedding) and water infrastructure failures fuel public frustration, posing tangible threats to economic stability and daily life. The service delivery protests in eThekwini began on 27 Feb 2024 due to water and power outages caused by an allegedly illegal strike by Samwu-affiliated municipal workers demanding higher wages. Despite the strike ending, backlogs persisted, leading frustrated residents in areas like Lindelani, Phoenix, and KwaMashu to protest on 22 May 2024 by blocking roads with burning tyres and concrete bricks. Mayor Mxolisi Kaunda announced the dismissal of 88 workers and the suspension of 81 others, with efforts underway to restore services and address the backlogs. On 12 Oct 2023, South Hills residents blocked main roads and burned tyres to protest a nearly eight-week water outage. The protest highlighted ongoing issues with the Meyersdal reservoir, leaving parts of Johannesburg without tap water for 53 days.

- **Unemployment and Economic Stagnation**: South Africa grapples with staggering unemployment rates (32.1%), exacerbating social disparities and discontent. In early April 2024, unemployed graduates, including 57 doctors, protested at the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health for job opportunities. Despite 120 advertised posts for doctors, pharmacists felt neglected, prompting further protests. Additionally, on 06 Jul 2023, the Congress of South African Trade Unions COSATU staged nationwide demonstrations demanding economic reforms amidst challenges like electricity shortages and high unemployment.

- **Violent Crime**: Pervasive crime rates, including high incidences of murder and rape, undermine public safety and erode trust in law enforcement.

Crime Index

Economic Percentage

Unemployment (%)

- **Corruption and Governance Challenges**: Scandals within ANC and government institutions contribute to disillusionment and demands for accountability. In Cape Town, South Africa, on 26 Jul 2023, the Democratic Alliance organized a protest against new legislation permitting racial quotas in the workplace. Protesters, representing diverse minority groups, opposed what they deemed discriminatory policies likely to worsen job scarcity and marginalization. Critics expressed concerns over potential job losses based on skin colour. Meanwhile, the government defended the law, citing its necessity for workforce transformation and addressing racial disparities in management roles. The protest highlighted societal tensions regarding employment equity legislation, emblematic of broader debates on racial equality and economic inclusion.

Physical Security Risks

- **Election Violence and Unrest**: Pre-election tensions may escalate into sporadic violence, looting, and public disruptions. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (2019), 350 politically related riots occurred in the period 08 Feb 2019 to 08 Aug 2019. The national rate of politically motivated riots during this period was around two riots per day. The majority of these 350 riots were violent service delivery protests, but there were also instances of "mob justice" involving political parties in some provinces.
- **Business Disruption**: Road blockades, transport disruptions, closures of business establishments and port closures may impede supply chains and operational continuity.
- **Security Challenges**: Heightened risks of political violence, protests, and civil unrest necessitate robust security measures and risk mitigation strategies.
- **Internet restrictions**: The internet blackout on 15 May 2024, during South Africa's General Elections disrupted business operations, significantly impacting productivity and economic activities nationwide. This incident raised concerns about the stability of digital infrastructure, leading to apprehension and reduced investor confidence ahead of the upcoming elections on 29 May. The potential for future outages remains a significant concern for businesses, which fear further disruptions to their operations.

- **Criminal Activity**: Based on the continued trends witnessed, it is extremely likely that criminal groups can conduct attacks during the voting days on electoral candidates and polling officers. The Democratic Alliance (DA) says its members have been attacked while putting up election campaign posters in Atteridgeville west of Pretoria. More such incidents can be anticipated ahead of the election.

Digital and Cyber Risks

- South Africa is facing a surge in cyberattacks ahead of national elections, with recent breaches at key agencies like the Government Pensions Administration Agency, the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission, and the Electoral Commission of South Africa.
- Reabetswe Motsamai, marketing and communications manager at MakwaIT Technologies, emphasised the increasing vulnerability of critical infrastructure due to frequent cyberattacks, which often compromise sensitive data such as personal and financial information.
- The severity and frequency of cyberattacks are expected to escalate, emphasising the critical need for advanced threat prevention measures in both the public and private sectors ahead of the election.
- South African businesses are targeted over 1,000 times per week on average, highlighting the vulnerability of critical infrastructure and the urgent requirement for enhanced cybersecurity defences.

Safeguarding the Vote

Time: The voting stations will be open from 0700 hrs to 2100 hrs on election day. (Local time)

Date : 29 May 2024

Registered Voters : 27,672,264 (On 29 May, nearly 28 million South African registered voters had the chance to elect representatives to the national and provincial parliaments.)

Eligibility: All South African citizens aged 18 and over are eligible to vote.

Seats and election pattern

- <u>National parliament</u>: One for 200 of the seats with just political parties named on the ballot
- <u>Provincial assembly</u>: One for the independent candidates or parties in the regional legislature.

How does the new three-ballot system work?

- For the first time this year, independent candidates are allowed to participate in the elections. To accommodate this change, voters will vote on three ballots, instead of two. First is the national ballot, which contains a list of the 52 political parties contesting 200 seats in the National Assembly. This ballot will be the same across the nation.
- Second is the regional ballot, which is to vote for political parties and independent candidates contesting for the 200 seats reserved for regions (provinces) in the National Assembly.
- Finally, there is the provincial ballot, which is unique to each province. Voters will use this ballot to elect political parties and independent candidates to serve in their province's legislature.

Coalition Scenario

- The constitution does not spell out how a coalition could be formed.
- But assuming the ANC remains the largest party, smaller groupings could informally agree to support an ANC government on a vote-by-vote basis in return for some concessions.
- Or, at the other end of possibilities, the ANC could enter a formal coalition with some parties, including a written agreement outlining legislative plans and the distribution of cabinet posts.

Security Arrangement

- Over 17,000 police officers will be stationed at 4,900 voting stations across the province.
- Approximately 215 stations (4.2% of total) identified as high risk.
- SA Army infantry soldiers, SAMHS (South Africa Military Health Services) medics, and logistics personnel to support South Africa Police Service during the elections.
- From 27 May until the announcement of results, South African Defense Force personnel will be deployed at voting stations.
- SANDF will assist in escorting voter material and Election commission of South Africa staff.
- Securing Infrastructure: Protection for election warehouses and the transportation of voting materials.
- Increased security in specific areas like R74 in Newdene due to previous incidents.
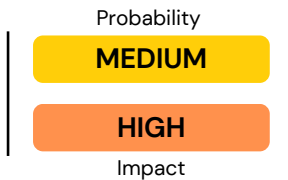- SAPS will maintain law and order, provide escorts to polling stations, and assist presiding officers.

Combating Mis/Disinformation

- Partnerships with organisations such as Meta, Google, and the Media Monitoring Development Agency (MDDA) help in implementing fact-checking programs on social media platforms to combat misinformation

- Google and Meta's Trust & Safety teams enforce policies against manipulated media, hate speech, harassment, and incitement to violence.

- The company also has a Threat Analysis Group (TAG) that identifies and tackles emerging threats, including influence operations and cyber espionage.

Conclusion

- The African National Congress (ANC) is expected to remain the largest party in South Africa's upcoming general election on 29 May 2024, but its support is projected to drop below 50% for the first time since the end of apartheid. While the ANC will likely maintain power, it may need to form a coalition government, which could lead to increased political instability.

- The ANC's declining popularity reflects growing dissatisfaction among South Africans who feel the party has failed to deliver on its promises to improve living standards and address issues such as unemployment, poverty, and inequality. The party has also been plagued by allegations of corruption and mismanagement.

- A weakened ANC is unlikely to push for significant policy changes post-elections. As a result, policy incoherence, operational challenges, and ineffective governance will persist.

- Consequently, the business environment is unlikely to significantly improve over the next five years, and operational challenges will remain.

Risk Assessment

Probability

MEDIUM

HIGH

Impact

Civil Unrest & Political Violence

- South Africa has a history of peaceful elections, however, chances of localised clashes between rival supporters cannot be ruled out.

- Businesses could experience disruptions from campaign rallies, as well as a slowdown in engagements with government departments as the election intensifies.

- Tension remains high as most parties accept the result. MK could protest in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng provinces perceived biassed voting, and counting process.

- Possibility of protest over service delivery, and minor voting issues in the semi-urban township.

- Unrest is likely across parts of South Africa following Jacob Zuma's ban from running in the elections.

- Most Likely Course of Action: uMkhonto we Sizwe and Jacob Zuma supporters are likely to carry out protests against the decision made by the court. The protests are likely to occur in the main Johannesburg CBD across the country, specifically in KwaZulu-Natal.

- Most Dangerous Course of Action: The unrest will lead to clashes between the demonstrators and the police. There is a likelihood of looting and road barricades being erected on major metropolitan highways. Demonstrators may target vehicles by throwing rocks at them. There is a possibility of the military being deployed to control the situation.

Cyber Risk

Probability
HIGH
HIGH
Impact

- Considering the high frequency of cyberattacks, the vulnerability of critical infrastructure, and the anticipated escalation in cyber threats, the risk assessment for South Africa facing cyberattacks ahead of national elections rates is High.

- Africa is experiencing a significant surge in cyberattacks, with key agencies like the Government Pensions Administration Agency, the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission, and the Electoral Commission of South Africa being breached.

- The increasing vulnerability of critical infrastructure due to frequent cyberattacks poses a substantial risk to sensitive data, including personal and financial information.

- The vulnerability heightens the potential for severe disruptions and compromises in essential services and operations, especially during critical events like national elections.

Operations and Infrastructure

Probability
MEDIUM
HIGH
Impact

- Operations and infrastructure risks remain high due to persistent issues of water and power outages.

- The country faces an energy crisis due to limited power generation, mismanagement at Eskom, and poor maintenance of power stations.

- As a result, scheduled power cuts, known as load shedding, continue across the country.

- Additionally, there is a growing water crisis driven by the mismanagement of water resources, increased demand, and deteriorating infrastructure.

- Rail and port infrastructure is also experiencing major issues due to mismanagement, corruption, and sabotage.

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