

RESEARCH REPORT

Regulating Political Finance in South Africa

Perspectives on the Political Funding Act
and its Implementation

2025



SOUTH AFRICA

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Research Report (RPxx/2025)



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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	4
CONTENTS	5
List of Tables	9
List of Figures	10
Acronyms and abbreviations	12
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	13
1. Introduction	24
1.1. Background and rationale.....	24
1.2. Objectives of the study	25
1.3. Structure of the report.....	26
2. Literature review.....	26
2.1. Is the IEC impartially and effectively implementing the PFA?.....	26
2.1.1. <i>Party Funding Act: 2021 until the present</i>	27
2.1.2. <i>Implementation approach and progress</i>	29
2.2. The IEC's dual mandate: Electoral integrity and political finance regulation.....	31
2.2.1. <i>Is it appropriate for the IEC to be mandated to ensure free and fair elections and political finance regulation?</i>	31
2.2.2. <i>The IEC's core mandate for free and fair elections</i>	31
2.2.3. <i>Political finance regulation under the Electoral Commission</i>	31
2.2.4. <i>Strengths of the Commission's dual mandate: Institutional benefits and international perspectives</i>	32
2.2.5. <i>Criticisms and challenges</i>	33
2.3. Private donations: Should the threshold and cap be changed?	34
2.3.1. <i>Main issues and proposals raised in the PBO presentation and in Committee deliberations</i>	36
2.3.2. <i>Policy considerations</i>	38
2.4. Political funding regulatory regime: An income and/or an expenditure focus?	40
2.4.1. <i>Income-focused regulatory approaches</i>	41
2.4.2. <i>Expenditure-focused regulatory approaches</i>	41

2.4.3.	<i>Regional variations in regulatory approaches</i>	42
2.4.4.	<i>Recent innovations and future directions</i>	44
2.5.	Do the benefits of private funding outweigh the risks?	44
2.6.	Political funding and gender equality: Gender parity and women's representation	46
2.7.	Multi-Party Democracy Fund: How can it be more attractive and effective?	52
2.7.1.	<i>Challenges facing the MPDF</i>	52
2.7.2.	<i>Guidance for enhancing the MPDF's effectiveness</i>	53
2.7.3.	<i>International practices</i>	54
2.7.4.	<i>MPDF's visibility and accessibility</i>	55
3.	Methodology.....	56
3.1.	Survey research methodology.....	56
3.1.1.	<i>The sample design</i>	56
3.1.2.	<i>Data collection protocol</i>	57
3.1.3.	<i>Fieldwork Procedures and Training</i>	57
3.1.4.	<i>Data Capturing and Weighting</i>	60
3.2.	Qualitative research methodology.....	61
3.2.1.	<i>Key informant interviews</i>	61
3.2.2	<i>Key informant questionnaire construction</i>	61
3.2.3	<i>Research training</i>	63
3.2.4	<i>Research ethics</i>	63
3.2.5	<i>Data collection approach</i>	63
3.2.6	<i>Data management</i>	64
3.2.7	<i>Data analysis</i>	64
4.	Results of the nationally representative public survey on political funding.....	65
4.1.	Political engagement and donations.....	65
4.1.1.	<i>Dissatisfaction with the political climate</i>	66
4.1.2.	<i>Patterns of political donation behaviour</i>	68
4.1.3.	<i>Support for the freedom to donate</i>	70
4.2.	Public backing for political donations rules.....	73
4.2.1.	<i>Awareness of South Africa's Political Funding Act</i>	73
4.2.2.	<i>Support for political financing regulations</i>	77

4.2.3.	<i>Anxiety over elite influence in South African politics</i>	80
4.2.4.	<i>Perceptions of transparency in political donations.....</i>	82
4.2.5.	<i>Support for donation maximum limitations</i>	85
4.2.6.	<i>Perceptions of donation thresholds</i>	89
4.3.	Public attitudes towards the role of the Electoral Commission	91
4.3.1.	<i>Support for Electoral Commission oversight of political funding information ...</i>	92
4.3.2.	<i>Views on importance of Electoral Commission tracking political spending.....</i>	94
4.3.3.	<i>Importance of Electoral Commission tracking political funding sources</i>	97
4.3.4.	<i>Confidence in Electoral Commission's ability to track political funding sources</i> 100	
4.3.5.	<i>Confidence in Electoral Commission's ability to enforce Political Funding Act</i>	103
4.4.	Attitudes towards the Multi-Party Democracy Fund	105
4.4.1.	<i>Awareness of the MPDF</i>	106
4.4.2.	<i>Confidence in the Electoral Commission's management of the MPDF</i>	109
4.4.3.	<i>Willingness to donate to the MPDF</i>	112
4.4.4.	<i>The voices of the people: Reasons for MPDF donation intentions.....</i>	115
4.4.5.	<i>Will tax rebates fail to boost willingness to donate?</i>	117
4.5.	Changes to the political financial regulatory framework.....	121
4.5.1.	<i>Support for monitoring party spending to ensure donation transparency.....</i>	121
4.5.2.	<i>Promoting female political representatives</i>	124
5.	Key informant interviews with thematic experts	128
5.1.	Effectiveness of the Electoral Commission in the implementation of the PFA	128
5.2.	Limitations in the Electoral Commission's capacity to implement the PFA	130
5.3.	Impartiality of the Electoral Commission	132
5.4.	Monitoring and enforcing compliance with the PFA	134
5.5.	Additional capacity for the Electoral Commission	141
5.6.	The impact of the PFA on the IEC's perceived impartiality in managing free and fair elections	143
5.7.	Is the IEC the most appropriate institution to implement the PFA?.....	148
5.8.	Compliance with the PFA during a gap in the law	153
5.9.	Private donations: Should the threshold and cap be changed?	155

5.10.	Regulatory regime: An income and/or an expenditure focus?	159
5.11.	Do the benefits of private funding outweigh the risks?	162
5.12.	A more attractive and effective Multiparty Democracy Fund?	164
5.13.	Political funding and gender parity: Enhancing women’s representation in South Africa	167
5.13.1	<i>Do gender considerations affect how political parties distribute their funding?</i>	168
5.13.2	<i>Do political parties treat male and female electoral candidates differently when allocating funds?.....</i>	170
5.13.3	<i>Do private or corporate donations negatively influence the number of women on political parties’ candidates lists?</i>	171
5.13.4	<i>How important is gender-sensitive budgeting in political campaigns?.....</i>	172
5.13.5	<i>What can be done to encourage political parties to invest more in women-led initiatives and gender-equal policies at all levels?</i>	174
5.13.6	<i>Could political funding, possibly including public allocations and / or private donations, be used in ways that advance, encourage or promote other relevant social objectives, such as equal gender representation in parties’ candidates lists?</i>	175
5.14	Conclusions from interviews	176
6.	Conclusions	178
7.	Way forward	189
	References	190
	Appendices	202
	Appendix 1: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module	202
	Appendix 2: Key informant interview (KII) schedule	208

List of Tables

Table 1: Sample Realisation for South African Social Attitudes Survey, 2024	60
Table 2: Thematic areas and key questions included in the key informant interviews.....	61
Table 3: Level of agreement and disagreement with the statement “you should have the freedom to donate money to political parties and independent candidates” by election participation (column percentages)	73
Table 4: Responses to the question: “How much have you heard or read about the Political Funding Act?” by political party affiliation (column percentages).....	77
Table 5: Level of support and opposition for laws like the Political Funding Act by past political donation behaviour (column percentages)	80
Table 6: Perception of a public who has too little or too much information about who donates money to political parties and independent candidates by support for laws like the Political Funding Act (PFA) (column percentages)	85
Table 7: Percentage of the population who think the donation maximum limit was too high or too low by support for laws like the Political Funding Act (PFA) (column percentages)	88
Table 8: Percentage of the population who think the donation threshold was too high or too low by support for laws like the Political Funding Act (PFA) (column percentages).....	91
Table 9: Perceived importance cohorts on collect information on political expenditure by past political donation behaviour (column percentages)	96
Table 10: Perceived importance cohorts on collect information on political funding sources, by levels of worry about the influence of political donations from the rich and powerful (column percentages)	99
Table 11: Perceived confidence in the Electoral Commission cohorts on collect information on political funding sources, by political donation behaviour (column percentages)	103
Table 12: Perceived confidence in the Electoral Commission cohorts to enforce compliance with political financial regulation requirements, by levels of worry about the influence of political donations from the rich and powerful (column percentages)	105
Table 13: Responses to the question: “How much have you heard or read about the Multi-Party Democracy Fund?”, by political party affiliation (column percentages)	109
Table 14: Perceived confidence in the Electoral Commission cohorts on managing the Multi-Party Democracy Fund, by awareness of the Multi-Party Democracy Fund (column percentages)	111
Table 15: Responses to the question: "How willing would you be to donate to the Multi-Party Democracy Fund?", by political party affiliation (column percentages)	114
Table 16: Responses to the question: "Would you be more or less willing to donate to the Multi-Party Democracy Fund if you received some money back on the taxes you pay (i.e., tax rebate)" by political party affiliation (column percentages)	120
Table 17: Levels of agreement and disagreement with the statement about whether monitoring political expenditure is the best way to keep track of donations, by election participation (column percentages)	124
Table 18: Levels of agreement and disagreement with the statement about the use of public money to support female political participation by election participation (column percentages)	127

List of Figures

Figure 1: An Example of a Small Area Layer Map used to Assist the Fieldwork Teams to Navigate to the Correct Areas	59
Figure 2: Public satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the way democracy is working in South Africa	66
Figure 3: Self-reported level of interest in politics for the general public	67
Figure 4: Public responses to the question: “Have you previously donated money to or raised funds for a political party or an independent candidate?”	68
Figure 5: Percentage of different subgroups who had participated in political donations and shown an intention to participation (row percentages)	69
Figure 6: Public agreement and disagreement with the statement: “you should have the freedom to donate money to political parties and independent candidates?”	71
Figure 7: Level of agreement and disagreement with the statement “you should have the freedom to donate money to political parties and independent candidates” across different subgroups (row percentages)	72
Figure 8: Public responses to the question: “How much have you heard or read about the Political Funding Act?”	74
Figure 9: Level of awareness of the Political Funding Act by select socio-demographic attributes (row percentages)	75
Figure 10: Public responses to the question: “To what extent do you support or oppose laws like the Political Funding Act that require all political parties and independent candidates to say where their funding comes from?”	77
Figure 11: Level of support and opposition for laws like the Political Funding Act by select socio-demographic attributes (row percentages)	78
Figure 12: Public responses to the question: “Overall, how worried are you that the decisions and actions of political parties and independent candidates in South Africa are being influenced by donations from the rich and powerful?”	80
Figure 13: Levels of worry about the influence of political donations from the rich and powerful across diverse subgroups (row percentages)	81
Figure 14: Public responses to the question: “Do you think the general public has too little or too much information about who donates money to political parties and independent candidates in South Africa”	83
Figure 15: Perception of a public who has too little or too much information about who donates money to political parties and independent candidates across dissimilar subgroups (row percentages)	84
Figure 16: Percentage of the population who think the donation maximum limit of R15 million rand was too low, too high or about right	86
Figure 17: Percentage of the population who think the donation maximum limit was too high or too low across different socio-demographic subgroups (row percentages)	87
Figure 18: Percentage of the population who think the threshold that political parties and independent candidates must report donations of R100,000 was too low, too high or about right	89
Figure 19: Percentage of the population who think the donation threshold was too high or too low across different socio-demographic subgroups (row percentages)	90
Figure 20: Public responses to the question: “In your opinion, who should be primarily responsible for collecting information about where political parties and independent candidates in South Africa get their funding?”	92
Figure 21: Percentage who said that the Electoral Commission should be primarily responsible for collecting information, by select socio-demographic subgroups	93

Figure 22: Perceived importance cohorts on collect information on political expenditure by select socio-demographic attributes (row percentages)	95
Figure 23: Perceived importance cohorts on collect information on political funding sources by select socio-demographic attributes (row percentages)	98
Figure 24: Perceived confidence in the Electoral Commission cohorts on collect information on political funding sources by select socio-demographic attributes (row percentages)	101
Figure 25: Perceived confidence in the Electoral Commission cohorts to enforce compliance with political financial regulation requirements, by select socio-demographic attributes (row percentages).....	104
Figure 26: Public responses to the question: “How much have you heard or read about the Multi-Party Democracy Fund?” (%)	106
Figure 27: Level of awareness of the Multi-Party Democracy Fund, by select socio-demographic attributes (row percentages)	107
Figure 28: Perceived confidence in the Electoral Commission cohorts on managing the Multi-Party Democracy Fund (MPDF), by select socio-demographic attributes (row percentages).....	110
Figure 29: Public responses to the question: “How willing would you be to donate to the Multi-Party Democracy Fund?” (%)	112
Figure 30: Levels of unwillingness and willingness to donate to the Multi-Party Democracy Fund across socio-demographic subgroups (row percentages)	113
Figure 31: Public responses to the question: "Would you be more or less willing to donate to the Multi-Party Democracy Fund if you received some money back on the taxes you pay (i.e., tax rebate)?"	117
Figure 32: Levels of unwillingness and willingness to donate if tax relief is provided, by socio-demographic subgroups (row percentages).....	118
Figure 33: Public agreement and disagreement with the statement: “monitoring how much a political party is spending is a good way to check how accurately it is reporting the donations it has received”	122
Figure 34: Levels of agreement and disagreement with the statement about whether monitoring political expenditure is the best way to keep track of donations, by select socio-demographic subgroups (row percentages)	123
Figure 35: Public agreement and disagreement with the statement: “one of the conditions of a political party receiving public money should be that it promotes and supports female representatives (e.g., on its party lists and in leadership roles)” (%).....	125
Figure 36: Levels of agreement and disagreement with the statement about the use of public money to support female political participation across select subgroups (row percentages)	126
Figure 37: Gender Social Norms Index, South Africa (2023).....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Figure 38: Gendered norms of leadership and education	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Acronyms and abbreviations

ACDP	African Christian Democratic Party
ANC	African National Congress
CASAC	Council for the Advancement of the South African Constitution
Cosatu	Congress of South African Trade Unions
DA	Democratic Alliance
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
EISA	Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa
EMAA	Electoral Matters Amendment Act 14 of 2024
EMB	Election Management Body
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IIDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IEC	Electoral Commission of South Africa
IECB	Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (Kenya)
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
MP	Member of Parliament
MPDF	Multi-Party Democracy Fund
MVC	My Vote Counts
OCSE	Organisation of European Communities
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OUTA	The Organisation Undoing Tax Abuse
PAdRe	Political Advert Repository
PBO	Parliamentary Budget Office
PC	Portfolio Committee
PFA	Political Funding Act (No. 6 of 2018) as amended
PMG	Parliamentary Monitoring Group
PPFA	Political Party Funding Act (No. 6 of 2018)
REC	Research Ethics Committee
SACBC	Southern African Catholic Bishop's Conference
SAL	Small Area Layer
SASAS	South African Social Attitudes Survey
SSU	Secondary Sampling Unit
UN	United Nations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) was commissioned by the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) to conduct a research study that examines the country's evolving political funding framework considering the Political Funding Act (PFA) No. 6 of 2018. The PFA was enacted to promote transparency, accountability, and fair competition in the financing of political parties and independent candidates and representatives. The legislation makes the disclosure of large donations mandatory, regulates both public and private funding, and established mechanisms such as the Multi-Party Democracy Fund (MPDF). With implementation beginning in 2021 and amendments made in 2024, the Act is aligned with constitutional imperative to support a multiparty democracy. The study, overseen by the Commission's Political Funding Unit (PFU) and the Research and Knowledge Management (RKM) Unit, explores the effectiveness of the current regime and identifies areas for potential policy improvement.

More specifically, the research study aimed to address several key research questions to guide discussion on the future of political funding regulation in the country. It examines the appropriate institutional role and capacity requirements for effective oversight and enforcement, and the underutilisation of the MPDF. It also assesses whether political funding mechanisms have advanced (or hold the potential to promote) gender equity in political representation, evaluates the adequacy of current disclosure thresholds and donation limits, considers the potential for tax and other incentives to encourage private contributions, and debates whether South Africa should consider shifting from an income-based to an expenditure-based regulatory model to improve funding transparency. The findings are intended to inform upcoming national and regional dialogues, and to guide policy development on political finance in South Africa.

METHODOLOGY

This research study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining a literature review and quantitative and qualitative techniques to explore public and expert perspectives on political funding in South Africa. The quantitative component drew on nationally representative data from the 2024 round of the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS), which involved face-to-face interviews with 2,912 adults using a stratified, multistage random sampling design. Ethical protocols were rigorously followed, including informed consent procedures and strict data protection measures.

The qualitative component consisted of 26 key informant interviews with experts from diverse sectors, including the Electoral Commission, political parties, civil society, academia, media and

donors. These interviews explored perceptions of the Political Funding Act's implementation, the effectiveness and impartiality of the Electoral Commission, and attitudes towards the Multi-Party Democracy Fund and gender-sensitive political finance. The study was conducted between October 2024 and March 2025. A structured thematic analysis of transcripts and key quotes was conducted to identify patterns and insights. The findings were triangulated across methods and sources to ensure robustness.

RESULTS FROM REPRESENTATIVE PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND DONATIONS

As context for the study, it is important to note that public dissatisfaction with the political and democratic status quo in South Africa is widespread. About four-fifths of the adult public believe that the country is headed in the wrong direction, with 58% of the public expressing discontent with democracy. Trust in political parties and politicians is low, with only 17% and 14% of the adult public, respectively, expressing confidence in them. Political disengagement is also prevalent, as most South Africans (including party members) show little interest in politics. Despite scepticism about electoral management, 66% of age-eligible voters would participate in an election if it was held tomorrow, and three-quarters see voting as a civic duty. Although confidence in democracy is weak, people still see electoral participation as an important part of being a citizen.

Political donations are not common in South Africa; less than a tenth of the mass public have ever donated to a political party or independent candidate. Among non-donors, 73% of them expressed no interest in donating in the future. Levels of participation varied across socio-demographic groups, with coloured adults more likely to have donated compared to Indian and white adults. Contrary to expectations, wealth and education were not strong predictors of donation behaviour. Gender played a role; women were less likely than men to donate to a political party or an independent candidate. Electoral participation was weakly linked to donation behaviour, with party members and supporters more inclined to contribute. It is important to remember that response bias may affect these findings, as individuals may be reluctant to disclose political donations due to privacy concerns or perceived social desirability considerations.

Public opinion on the freedom to donate to political parties and independent candidates in South Africa is generally neutral or positive. About half of all adults agreed or strongly agreed that people should have this freedom. There were attitudinal differences among population groups, with white adults more likely to disagree. In addition, strong regional variations could be observed, with higher levels of agreement in KwaZulu-Natal and lower levels in the Free State. Electoral participation appeared to shape attitudes; regular voters were more likely to support the freedom to donate than sporadic voters or non-voters. Interestingly, prior donation

behaviour did not significantly influence attitudes here, suggesting that perceptions of this freedom are shaped more by broader democratic engagement than by direct experience with donations.

PUBLIC BACKING FOR POLITICAL DONATIONS RULES

Public awareness of the Political Funding Act (PFA) in South Africa is generally low, with 61% of the adult public having never heard of it. Awareness is strongly linked to education, socio-economic status, and political engagement, with more educated and wealthier individuals, as well as those who have donated to political parties or are politically active, being more informed. Women were less aware of the PFA than men, and awareness levels varied across provinces, being especially low in Mpumalanga and Limpopo. While political party members had higher levels of awareness, the difference between active and inactive members was minimal. These findings highlight a significant gap in public knowledge on this important issue, indicating the need for greater civic education and outreach to improve transparency and accountability on this issue for certain key groups. It should be noted that public awareness is low in many areas of political life, including awareness for instance of the work of the Zondo Commission despite it being televised and reported on for four years.

Public support for laws like the PFA was found to be relatively muted, with only 42% of the general public expressing support while 14% opposed such regulation. A large portion of the mass public remained neutral (29%) or unsure (16%) about this issue. Support was higher among those with post-secondary education and varied by province, with the strongest backing observed in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal and the weakest in Northern Cape and Free State. White adults were more likely to oppose laws like the PFA than other population groups, even after controlling for socio-demographic factors. Past political donation behaviour did not significantly influence support for financial regulation. But amongst non-participants, those who intended to donate in the future were more likely to support them (55%) compared to those with no intention (37%) or past donors (41%).

Most adults expressed concern that political parties and independent candidates are influenced by donations from wealthy elites. We discovered 16% of the general public was extremely worried, 21% very worried, and 33% somewhat worried. In contrast, a minority (23%) of adults reported little to no concern while 6% were uncertain. Higher levels of education and socio-economic status were associated with greater concern about elite influence. Being a regular voter was also correlated with being worried about this issue. Regionally, the level of concern about elite manipulation was highest in the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal. It was, by comparison, lowest in the Eastern Cape, Limpopo and Northern Cape. Individuals concerned about elite manipulation were more likely to support financial regulations like the PFA.

Survey results revealed that public perceptions of transparency in political donations are mixed, with roughly half of adults believing the public has too little or far too little information about who donates to political parties and independent candidates. Subgroup analysis showed notable provincial differences in concern about the information environment, with higher concern in Mpumalanga. There were also educational attainment differences; concern about the level of public information was highest amongst those with a post-secondary education. Concern about the level of transparency was linked to awareness of the PFA. Survey findings also highlighted the role of transparency concerns in shaping public attitudes toward regulatory measures like the PFA. Those who perceived there to be insufficient public information were more likely to support regulatory measures.

Our data showed polarised public opinions on the R15-million annual donation limit for political parties and independent candidates. Nearly half (46%) of all adults considered the cap too high or far too high, while 29% viewed it as appropriate and only 10% thought it was too low. Socio-demographic analysis showed significant provincial and socio-economic differences, with wealthier individuals and residents in provinces like Gauteng and the Free State more likely to favour stricter donation limits. Support for laws like the PFA correlated with perceptions of the donation cap, as those backing such laws were less likely to view the limit as excessive.

Public opinion was quite divided on the R100,000 donation reporting threshold for political parties and independent candidates. We found that 41% of the general public considered it appropriate, 22% view it as too high and 23% believed it was too low. Subgroup analysis showed significant differences by race and province of residence. White adults and residents in the Free State and the Northern Cape were found to be more likely to view the threshold as inadequate. Awareness of the PFA also influenced opinions about threshold limits, those familiar with the law were more likely to consider the threshold excessive.

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TO THE ROLE OF THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

About two-thirds (64%) of the adult public believed the Electoral Commission should be primarily responsible for collecting information on political party and independent candidate funding. A minority (11%) of the public felt no organisation should have this responsibility, and around 13% suggested an alternative institution should handle it. A preference for the Electoral Commission varied by educational attainment, with formal schooling positively correlated with a partiality for the Electoral Commission. We also found that a preference for the Commission was stronger among those who participated in politics. Active political party members and voters were more likely to favour the Electoral Commission in this role, while non-voters showed less support for its responsibility.

Public opinion data indicates that most of the mass public consider it important for the Electoral Commission to collect information on political expenditure, with a significant portion assigning

it high importance scores. Those in higher income socio-economic groups were more likely to view it as critical. Past donors to political parties or independent candidates were less likely to think this was an important task. Support for laws like the PFA correlated with the perceived importance of tracking political spending. Furthermore, individuals who were concerned about the influence of wealthy donors on politics rated the importance of collecting funding data higher than those who were less worried. Additionally, adults who felt the public lacked sufficient information on political donations were more likely to prioritise the Electoral Commission's role in gathering data.

A majority of the general public believed that the Electoral Commission should prioritise tracking funding sources for political parties and independent candidates. Approximately a third (30%) thought it was moderately important and 38% considered it very important. Only a small minority (13%) deem it unimportant. Those who value tracking political funding sources tend to think that monitoring party and candidate spending was important. Analysis reveals that people view both information-gathering activities as equally important. People who were concerned about wealthy donors influencing politics are more likely to think funding information gathering to be important. Those who believe there is a deficiency in funding information are more likely to think that this task is important.

A substantial portion of the mass public lacked confidence in the Electoral Commission's ability to accurately collect funding information from political parties. Roughly a fifth (19%) had no confidence in the Commission and 17% had little confidence. Responses to this question differed by educational attainment; individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to provide an answer that they were confident and less likely to respond with "don't know". This group has a better understanding of the political climate and tends to have a higher trust in election transparency. Confidence also varied by province, being highest in Mpumalanga and lowest in the Eastern Cape as well as KwaZulu-Natal. Black Africans generally expressed more confidence than other population (especially white individuals). We found that people who value funding transparency were more likely to trust the Electoral Commission's ability to collect that information. In addition, our research suggests that individuals with direct experience in political donations were more sceptical of its monitoring abilities.

The adult public was not confident in the Electoral Commission's ability to take action against political parties and independent candidates who fail to comply with the PFA or provide inaccurate funding information. Less than a tenth (9%) gave the Commission a very high confidence score on this issue and 12% expressed fairly high confidence. Slightly over a third (36%) expressed moderate confidence, a fifth (19%) low confidence, and an equivalent share (19%) very low confidence, while 5% were uncertain how to respond. Those who were more confident in the Commission's ability to gather political funding information also tended to have higher confidence in its ability to enforce compliance with the PFA. People who were concerned

about the influence of wealthy donors on politics were more likely to trust the Commission's enforcement abilities. It would seem that they viewed the Commission as a safeguard against elite manipulation. Additionally, individuals who believed in the freedom to donate to political parties showed higher confidence in the Commission's enforcement role. This group may see the work of the Commission as essential for ensuring transparency and accountability while protecting the political system from corruption.

ATTITUDES TO THE MULTI-PARTY DEMOCRACY FUND

Survey findings reveal a largely uninformed public regarding the Multi-Party Democracy Fund (MPDF), which was established in April 2021, with over half (58%) of adults never having heard of it. Only a small minority (11%) of the public had heard quite a bit or a lot about it. Awareness of the MPDF is strongly correlated with higher levels of educational attainment and socio-economic status. In addition, awareness levels varied by province of residence with awareness particularly low in Limpopo and Mpumalanga. Awareness also varied by gender and population group, being lower for women and members of the black African majority. Awareness of the MPDF is also positively correlated with awareness of the PFA, people who were more aware of the former were discovered to be more aware of the latter. These results indicate a need for intensified public outreach and education for certain groups.

There is a significant lack of confidence in the Electoral Commission's ability to manage the MPDF fairly and effectively, with roughly two-fifths of adults expressing either very low confidence (24%) or fairly low confidence (19%). Levels of confidence vary by socio-demographic factors, with higher education and socio-economic status correlating with greater trust in the Commission. There is also a lot of provincial variation on this issue; provinces like Limpopo and the North West were discovered to have relatively low levels of confidence. Awareness of the MPDF also plays a role, as those more informed about the fund tend to have higher confidence in its management. Additionally, there is a strong positive correlation between confidence in the Commission's ability to collect funding information and its management of the MPDF. This suggests that trust in its technical capabilities underpins broader confidence in its regulatory functions.

Data analysis found widespread reluctance among South Africans to donate to the MPDF; nearly three quarters of adults said they were not at all (47%) or not very (27%) willing to donate. We were able to discern that willingness to donate was higher among past political donors, party supporters, and individuals aware of the MPDF. These findings suggest that political engagement and awareness were strong predictors of willingness to donate. Socio-demographic factors also play a role, with older generations and residents in the Eastern Cape being less inclined to contribute. Adults who have never voted are less willing to donate to the MPDF than the national average, with most expressing little or no interest. In addition, those who have previously

donated to a party or candidate are more likely to contribute to the MPDF. These results show the need for targeted outreach to increase public support for the MPDF.

Fieldworkers asked survey participants an open-ended question about why they were willing or unwilling to donate to the MPDF. Many adults expressed reluctance to donate due to a lack of awareness, distrust in political processes in general, and concerns about the misuse of funds. Financial constraints also play a significant role; some of the mass public felt unable to contribute beyond their basic needs. On the other hand, those willing to donate see it as a civic duty to strengthen democracy, promote transparency, and empower marginalised groups (particularly women). These findings reaffirm the need for improved public education and outreach to address scepticism and foster broader support for the MPDF as a tool for political accountability and social change.

Survey participants were asked if they would be willing to donate to the MPDF if a tax rebate was offered. This offer was discovered to have a limited influence on public willingness to donate to the MPDF, with two-thirds of the mass public expressing low willingness regardless of the incentive. These findings suggest that financial incentives alone are unlikely to significantly alter public attitudes toward political donations. Gender, education, province, race, and political affiliation shaped responses. We discovered that men, younger adults, and people living in the Western Cape showed higher willingness to donate under these conditions. By contrast, more educated, white adults as well as residents of the Eastern Cape, the Northern Cape and the North West showed less willingness. Active political party members and past donors were more likely to respond positively to the rebate offer.

CHANGES TO POLITICAL FINANCE REGULATIONS

We found that a majority (55%) of the public supports tracking political party expenditures as an effective way to verify the accuracy of reported donations, reflecting a belief in financial monitoring as a tool for transparency. Public opinion on this issue varied across socio-demographic groups, with higher socio-economic status and education levels correlated with stronger support for this idea. We found that those in certain provinces (i.e., the Northern Cape and Limpopo) expressed less confidence in this method. Voters and those intending to donate to political parties or independent candidates in the future are more likely to support expenditure tracking, suggesting that future donors may favour stricter financial oversight. Past donors, on the other hand, exhibited scepticism about this option. These findings highlight the need for tailored communication and policy design to address public concerns and build trust in political financing mechanisms.

Approximately half (49%) of the adult public supported the idea that political parties receiving public funds should be required to promote and support female representatives. We detected population group differences; members of the white and Indian minorities were more likely than

other groups to express opposition to usage of political funding as a mechanism to promote the representation of vulnerable groups, such as women. Support for this proposal was found to be highest in KwaZulu-Natal and weakest in the Free State and the Western Cape. More educated individuals showed greater support for the provision. Generational differences in support for using public funds for political equality were small, though Generation Z was slightly less likely to agree than other generations. Voters and politically active individuals were more likely to endorse this precondition for political parties receiving public funds. These findings highlight public recognition of gender disparities in politics and suggest moderate support for using public funding as a tool to advance gender equality in politics.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS WITH THEMATIC EXPERTS

This section of the research study relied on the views of the key informant respondents who comprised gender experts, political party representatives, academics, civil society representatives, union and media representatives, and donors.

EFFECTIVENESS OF ELECTORAL COMMISSION IN IMPLEMENTING THE PFA

Most respondents believed that, overall, the IEC is effectively implementing the PFA but acknowledged some strengths and weaknesses. For instance, respondents felt that the administrative arm for political funding is considered reasonably capacitated, but that the investigation function could be clarified and strengthened. The IEC's effectiveness is hampered by some uncertainty and unevenness concerning its investigative authority and capacity, technical inefficiencies in the online funding declaration platform, and perceived communication weaknesses affecting donor and public understanding of the IEC's mandates and roles.

ENSURING EFFECTIVE COMPLIANCE WITH THE PFA

Virtually every respondent believes that the IEC also faces challenges in ensuring effective compliance with the Act. In this regard, the biggest challenge for the IEC is to provide as much transparency and consistency as possible during the enforcement of the Act and regulations and to build trust in its dealings with political parties and reporting to the public.

PERCEIVED IMPARTIALITY OF THE COMMISSION

Perceptions regarding the IEC's impartiality differed, with some political parties expressing scepticism, while civil society and donor respondents strongly affirmed the IEC's neutrality. Public attitudes are similarly divided. The IEC's ability to maintain its credibility and impartiality depends largely on its ability to navigate complexities, potentially supported by enhanced public education and adequate resources. Any sign of perceived favouritism or not taking account of glaring financial discrepancies could be viewed as being partial.

ADDITIONAL CAPACITY FOR THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

Virtually all key informants interviewed suggested that the IEC requires one or more capacity enhancement for effective PFA compliance. This includes improving the reliability and accessibility of electronic reporting systems by simplifying processes and automating reminders. The availability of forensic and auditing expertise would strengthen the capacity to ensure that financial disclosures are more effectively verified, as would ready access to relevant information held by other state institutions. The PFA investigation function is currently outsourced on a case-by-case basis to an IEC-mandated panel of independent investigators.

Expanding existing public awareness campaigns could enhance public understanding by clarifying the IEC's role, potentially strengthening its credibility and impartiality. Furthermore, fostering coordination with other oversight bodies while maintaining the IEC's independence is crucial. Potential partners identified include the Auditor-General, SARS, the FIC, the Hawks, and other law enforcement agencies.

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE REGULATORY MODELS

It is important to recognise that these two models aim to achieve different regulatory objectives. Monitoring income prioritises transparency about contestants, which empowers voters and prevents undue foreign or domestic influence, while tracking or regulating expenditure promotes a level playing field for political contestants and helps prevent wealthy parties buying influence through massive campaigns.

South Africa's current political funding regulatory regime primarily monitors income, specifically donations to political parties and independent candidates, although the PFA requires all registered political parties to submit audited annual financial statements that include expenditure. However, this approach has limitations, as many respondents believe that political parties may not declare all income or may disguise donations as income through events like gala dinners. These types of actions raise concerns that an income-based system alone may not ensure sufficient transparency.

Some respondents therefore advocated for an expenditure-based system, suggesting that it would provide a more reasonable measure of a party's financial activities and connections. The respondents also reasoned that an expenditure-based model could also lead to more uniform regulation by including a limit on campaign expenditure and might be easier to audit. However, concerns exist regarding the administrative feasibility and burden of monitoring all expenditures, as highlighted by respondents and the experience cited from the UK.

Besides the choice between an income or an expenditure approach, some respondents recommended a hybrid model, in which there is a combination of income and expenditure monitoring. These respondents reasoned that it is a more comprehensive and reliable approach

to detect dishonesty. Monitoring both aspects would provide a more complete picture of party funding and allow for investigations if there is a significant discrepancy between declared income and expenditure. International guidelines also suggest including both categories of information. It is acknowledged that the administrative burden and the need for a gradual transition are important considerations. Overall, while the current income-based system provides a foundation, incorporating expenditure monitoring in some form could enhance transparency and accountability.

THE BENEFITS AND RISKS OF PRIVATE FUNDING

The impact of direct private funding on electoral democracy is a contested topic, with varying perspectives on its benefits and risks. Private funding is essential for political competition, particularly for new and smaller parties to enter the political landscape. Without private funding, new party entrants and independent candidates would struggle to compete and could even disappear. In contrast, concerns exist that as complete reliance on state funding could entrench the power of incumbent parties, who might use funding to maintain their dominance. Private funding is also a crucial element of the constitutional rights to freedom of association and expression.

However, significant risks are associated with private funding, primarily the potential for undue influence and corruption. The idea that “there's no free lunch” highlights the concern that private donors may expect something in return for their contributions. Some respondents suggested that moving private donations through a neutral body like the Multi-Party Democracy Fund could mitigate these risks.

Transparency is consistently emphasised as a crucial factor in managing the risks associated with private funding. Efforts should focus on improving transparency regarding the sources of private funding.

PRIVATE DONATIONS: SHOULD THE THRESHOLD AND CAP BE CHANGED?

Most political parties interviewed were in favour of loosening restrictions, while most other stakeholders were largely in support of tightening them, i.e., a lower disclosure threshold and a lower annual donation limit (cap). These preferences partly align with public opinion, with dominant responses consistently favouring a lower annual donation limit, but providing a more mixed view on disclosure thresholds. The most cited public response was to leave the disclosure threshold at the current level, with equal shares saying it should be lowered and raised. The issue may now be moot, following the National Assembly's resolution in May 2025 to double both. The recommendation in the NA's resolution will now be considered by the President in terms of the PFA.

IS THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION THE MOST APPROPRIATE INSTITUTION TO IMPLEMENT THE PFA?

While most respondents believe the IEC should retain overall oversight responsibility for implementing the PFA, there are arguments for considering alternative or supplementary institutions. One such argument suggests that the IEC's dual mandate (administering elections and enforcing the PFA) creates inherent conflicts, and that political funding regulation, especially investigations, might be better managed by a separate more technically focused body. This perspective highlights concerns that the IEC's primary role of ensuring free and fair elections could be compromised by its current dual mandate. There is broad support for collaboration with other institutions to address the IEC's capacity constraints and enhance investigative effectiveness.

GENDER PARITY AND POLITICAL FUNDING

Political party funding, gender parity, and women's representation have become increasingly important topics in scholarly and policy discussions surrounding electoral systems and political participation. Despite the growing recognition of the need for gender equality in politics, women's political representation remains significantly low, with women holding only a small proportion of parliamentary and ministerial positions globally. Despite a recent decline, women's representation among public representatives remains comparatively high in South Africa. This underrepresentation can be attributed to various structural barriers, including entrenched gender norms, limited access to financial resources, and societal expectations that constrain women's political involvement. While quotas and affirmative action policies have made steady strides in improving gender parity, the unequal distribution of political funding continues to undermine true gender equality in political spaces. These dynamics highlight the intersection between political funding and gender, where financial barriers create significant challenges for women in accessing among others the necessary resources to run successful political campaigns.

In the South African context, understanding the role of financial support in shaping women's political participation is vital for addressing the gender disparities that persist within the country's political system. Despite significant progress in promoting gender equality, such as the introduction of gender quotas in the African National Congress, for example, and the establishment of a relatively high percentage of women in Parliament, financial barriers continue to hinder women's full political participation. Women in South Africa, particularly those from marginalised communities, often lack access to the necessary resources, networks, and donor support that would allow them to campaign and compete in elections effectively. These challenges are compounded by traditional gender norms and the male-dominated political environment, which limit women's influence and visibility in high-profile political positions. Without targeted financial support and gender-responsive political funding mechanisms,

women may struggle to overcome these structural barriers, perpetuating a cycle of underrepresentation. Thus, addressing the intersection of financial resources and gender equality is essential to creating a more inclusive political landscape in South Africa, where women can have equal opportunities to influence policy and governance. Some key informants supported exploring the Multi-Party Democracy Fund (MPDF) as a vehicle to promote more equal gender representation.

THE MULTI-PARTY DEMOCRACY FUND

Public opinion survey data demonstrates that public awareness of the MPDF is very low. Almost 80% of respondents indicated that they know nothing or only a little about the Fund. Less than 20% of respondents indicated some possible interest in contributing to the Fund. Stakeholders interviewed suggested that most donors are more interested in a party's policies than in contributing to a fund that distributes contributions to all represented political parties, some of which promote policies not favoured by contributors. The survey results show that the possibility of tax deductions to incentivise contributions appears to have limited appeal in changing pro-donation inclinations.

Some stakeholders cautioned the Commission to safeguard its independence and impartiality as the EMB while undertaking any initiatives to raise awareness of and interest in the Fund. The Commission's role in MPDF engagement should maintain a clear separation between its regulatory responsibilities and contributor mobilisation efforts.

WAY FORWARD

This report has identified public attitudes, stakeholder and expert opinions, as well as various trends involving the regulation of political funding in South Africa. The report is submitted to the Electoral Commission for further consideration. Any possible further work will be carried out by the Commission.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and rationale

In recent years, the issue of political funding has gained increasing prominence in South Africa, reflecting a broader global concern over issues of transparency, equity, and accountability in democratic governance. The enactment of the Political Funding Act No. 6 of 2018 (PFA), which came into effect on 1 April 2021 and was amended in 2024, marked a pivotal moment in the country's ongoing process of democratic consolidation. The PFA seeks to regulate both public and private funding of political parties and independent candidates, promote transparency through mandatory disclosure requirements, and curb undue influence and corruption in electoral politics. It does so by creating a clear regulatory framework for party finance by

establishing two key funding mechanisms, namely the Political Representatives Fund (PRF) and the Multi-Party Democracy Fund (MPDF), and outlining measures for enforcement. The mandate associated with this regulatory framework has been assigned to the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC).

The implementation of the PFA is closely aligned with the constitutional imperatives outlined in sections 1(d) and 236 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, which guarantee universal adult suffrage, a multi-party system of democratic government, and the provision of public funding to enhance representative democracy. Despite the ambitious objectives of the Act, there remain concerns regarding its operationalisation, the capacity of the Electoral Commission to enforce compliance effectively, and the willingness of political actors to embrace its transparency and accountability provisions. In this context, it is critical to assess the current state of political funding in South Africa, with a focus on the Act's effectiveness and the potential for institutional reform and policy innovation.

In response to this need, the IEC commissioned a research study and the development of policy briefs to investigate key themes arising from the implementation of the PFA. The study, undertaken by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), forms part of the Commission's broader efforts to foster evidence-informed dialogue and strengthen democratic integrity. It explores critical political funding issues, such as the appropriateness of the IEC's dual mandate, the effectiveness of current political funding regulations, the role of private funding, gender equity in party financing, and the challenges and opportunities associated with the MPDF.

1.2. Objectives of the study

The primary aim of this study is to generate empirical insight and policy-relevant recommendations on the evolving landscape of political funding in South Africa. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- Evaluate the effectiveness and impartiality of the IEC in implementing the Political Funding Act;
- Assess public and expert opinion on the thresholds and limits for private donations;
- Explore attitudes towards the Multi-Party Democracy Fund and strategies for its enhancement;
- Examine the relationship between political finance and gender equality in representation;
- Investigate the feasibility and desirability of different regulatory approaches (e.g., income-based vs. expenditure-based);
- Consider whether responsibility for investigating breaches of the Act should remain with the IEC or be transferred to another institution;
- Identify the institutional and technical capacities required by the IEC to ensure full compliance with the Act.

In doing so, the study provides a foundation for informed deliberation at both national and regional symposia events planned by the IEC and its partners, including International IDEA. The findings are also intended to contribute to broader policy and legislative debates on democratic reform, transparency, and political accountability.

1.3. Structure of the report

This report is structured into six main chapters. Following this introductory section, Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive literature review that synthesises existing knowledge and debates related to political funding in South Africa and globally. Chapter 3 outlines the mixed-methods research methodology, including both the nationally representative South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) module and a series of key informant interviews (KIIs) with stakeholders from government, civil society, academia, and political parties. Chapter 4 presents the results from the public opinion survey, highlighting citizen awareness, attitudes, and experiences related to political funding and the PFA. Chapter 5 details findings from the KIIs, providing in-depth qualitative insights into the perspectives of thematic experts. Finally, Chapter 6 synthesises the key findings from the study.

2. Literature review

2.1. Is the IEC impartially and effectively implementing the PFA?

Worldwide, many democracies permit private contributions to the funding of political parties and candidates. The issue of funding political parties has spurred extensive scholarly debate. The prevalence of private donations to political parties in both Global North and South democracies is highlighted in earlier works by Fisher (1997), Briffault (1999), and Molomo and Sebudubudu (2005), although the scale of these donations differs significantly across regions. South Africa is no different in this regard. Sarakinsky (2007) observed that funding for political parties and the election process has been in practice since the first democratic act of 1994. Tshitereke (2004) argued that South Africa's democracy risks being 'bought' and critiqued the role of financing and funding as compromising the integrity of the election process. Another risk is that election legitimacy and voter trust can be undermined by the role of funding in politics (Sokomani, 2002:85). In contrast, research by Pottie (2003: 8) shows that running for office is a costly undertaking. The competitive nature of South Africa's multiparty democracy highlights the importance of funding as a means for political parties to compete effectively (Bryan and Baer, 2005).

2.1.1. Party Funding Act: 2021 until the present

The Political Party Funding Act of 2018 (PPFA) was implemented in 2021. Significant amendments were included in the renamed Political Funding Act of 2024. The PPFA was initially enacted following the Constitutional Court's ruling in *My Vote Counts*' legal challenge which criticised the Promotion of Access to Information Act 2 of 2000 (PAIA) for insufficient transparency regarding private political party and independent candidate funding (Porat, 2021: 504). The Constitutional Court decision (*My Vote Counts*, 2023: 5) reinforced the strong link between voting rights and transparent political funding. The Electoral Commission's responsibilities since the PFA's 2021 implementation include monitoring political party declarations, submitting annual reports to Parliament, and enforcing compliance with the legislation (Gerber, 2023). Mngomezulu (2022), however, notes the IEC's limited enforcement authority, potentially hindering its ability to effectively implement the Act, a limitation the IEC itself recognises (Nyathi, 2023). Khumalo (2022) highlights the IEC's response through capacity-building efforts, which include appointing investigators to probe allegations of undeclared donations. The IEC's capacity expansion in its party funding unit (PFU) has been negatively impacted by bureaucratic obstacles, such as budget cuts, as detailed by Dentlinger (2024) and Thuynsma (2025). Since the Act's 2021 implementation, the IEC (2024: 12) has also noted difficulties with 'environmental' factors and building the needed 'infrastructure'. The low number of political party declarations, only 12 according to the IEC's 2024-2025 first-quarter report, is a consequence of this, especially considering that 52 parties competed in the May 2024 national elections (IEC, 2024).

Political parties have responded differently to the new law since its enactment. The African National Congress (ANC) in its 55th party conference resolution (2023:1) acknowledges that the Act will require the party to approach fundraising differently. According to Cowan (2022), the ANC proposed amendments to raise the current declaration threshold from R100,000 to R250,000 and the annual threshold to R50 million. The Democratic Alliance (DA) declared their disapproval of the Act calling it "hopelessly inadequate" (Shomolekae, 2021) but pledged compliance. In contrast, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) argue the Act forces opposition parties to innovate and discover new ways to find financial sustainability (Simelane, 2024). As the Act mandates declarations from all political parties, independent candidates and independent representatives, as Brierley and de Kadt (2024) point out, it is unclear how it supposedly disproportionately disadvantages opposition parties. The law mandates the IEC to probe any suspected failure to declare (*My Vote Counts* and SANEF, 2022: 14). Mahlathi (2023) suggests that the EFF might be discouraging donations exceeding the existing R100,000 disclosure threshold, thereby potentially circumventing mandatory donation disclosures to the IEC. While expressing concerns about the potential negative consequences, including damage to South Africa's multi-party democracy, ActionSA leader Herman Mashaba announced his party's support for the Act (Mashaba, 2021). As Chetty (2023) notes, the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) supports the Political Funding Act (PFA) and opposes the ANC's suggested revisions to the

thresholds and caps, believing these to be politically motivated and that they will undermine the Act's integrity.

There is widespread agreement across the political spectrum on the PFA's crucial role in ensuring accountability through transparency. There was great interest in large donations to new political parties such as Rize Mzansi's R15 million donation from Rebecca Oppenheimer (Dentlinger, 2024) or Martin Moshal's R11.5-million-rand donation to Build One SA (Thorne, 2024). The IEC's access to accurate political party funding information continues to be questioned, particularly regarding parties that held large campaign events while declaring minimal or no donations. Goba (2024) highlights that Action SA questioned how the EFF managed to organise a high-profile and elaborate 10-year anniversary celebration despite a financial declaration of only R3.5 million for the third and fourth quarters of the 2023-2024 financial year. According to Action SA, the discrepancy stems from a failure to enforce the legislation and the IEC's refusal to acknowledge and act on the vast difference between declared income versus actual spending on party and manifesto launches (Rall, 2023). My Vote Counts further alleged that the MK Party did not disclose any donations from 1 October to 31 December 2023, the third quarter of the 2023-2024 fiscal year. MVC regards this as unlikely to be credible shortly before the 2024 general election, and as necessitating IEC investigation. ActionSA recently filed an application with the North Gauteng High Court 'to compel the IEC to disclose its record of decision refusing to investigate the African National Congress' (ANC) R102 million debt settlement agreement with Ezulweni Investments'. ActionSA argued further that '[e]ssentially, only a series of disclosed donations approximating the amount owed would be a legitimate explanation for how the ANC settled this debt in a manner that adheres to the Act...' (Beaumont, 2025).

Compliance with the PFA appears to be a challenge. In the 2022-2023 financial year, just 46 out of 531 registered political parties complied with the PFA's request for financial statements, according to the IEC's 2023 annual report (2023: 20). In the 2021/2022 first-quarter reports, just three parties, the ANC, DA, and Action SA, made declarations (IEC, 2022). Thirteen (13) political parties submitted their entries by the end of the fourth quarter (IEC, 2022). Even with progress from previous years, consistent compliance proved difficult. For non-compliance with the PFA's financial statement submission deadlines to the IEC, the electoral court levied fines against the ANC, ATM, COPE, PAC, NFP, and AIC in 2024 (Allsop, 2024).

The IEC's primary constitutional duty is to ensure free and fair elections. Data from the Human Science Research Council's (HSRC) Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) from the 2021 Local Government Elections shows that an overwhelming majority of South Africans were satisfied with the quality of services provided by the IEC during the process of voting (IEC, 2022). A public evaluation of the IEC, including determining levels of trust in the institution, reveals that trust in the IEC has been on the decline. The IEC's 2021 election indicators report (2021: 32), using data from the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS), reveals a troubling decline in public trust,

dropping from 70% in 2010 to 41% in 2020. An important factor to consider, however, is that trust in democratic institutions generally is low (Davids, 2020). Despite these slippages, public opinion data sourced through SASAS showcases that while trust in institutions such as local government, national government and the legislature have plummeted significantly, the IEC remains one of the few state institutions that is regarded as (relatively) trustworthy (Roberts, 2024). Positive feedback, especially from the ESS, suggests that the public sees the IEC solely as an election management body. The addition of political funding responsibilities, once more widely known, could erode public confidence in the institution, especially given the current climate of disinformation and personal attacks. South Africa's electoral landscape, marked by the significant use of populist strategies, jeopardizes the IEC's credibility and its ability to oversee political party funding.

South Africa's financial struggles are well-documented and, more recently, budget cuts, a consequence of ongoing austerity measures (Clarke, 2022), are currently impacting the IEC and other key Chapter 9 institutions. As My Vote Counts (2022) demonstrated, these budget cuts endanger democracy by harming the IEC's operational capacity. According to Jeenah (2024), the difficulties in achieving compliance undermine democracy and pose a significant obstacle to the IEC's implementation of the PFA. The IEC's already limited resources are further stretched by the added responsibilities of ensuring PFA implementation. Implementation of the PFA entails financial accounting, forensic auditing and investigative expertise that probably extends beyond the Commission's usual or existing election-related capacities.

2.1.2. Implementation approach and progress

The IEC, while operating under constraints adopted a pragmatic implementation strategy for the PPFA/PFA, emphasising support for compliance during the initial rollout. IEC Chief Electoral Officer, Sy Mamabolo articulated this approach, stating: "We do not want to be the party funding transparency police. We want to be the party funding transparency facilitators" (BizCommunity, 2021). This approach acknowledges the time needed to build enforcement capacity and the significant reliance on parties' self-regulation and voluntary compliance for successful implementation. It realistically assesses the IEC's current capacity limitations while pursuing the Act's transparency goals.

The IEC's implementation has shown some positive results. A year after commencement, the Commission's preliminary assessment labelled the programme a success, acknowledging the common difficulties inherent in any new programme. According to the Commission, new systems and structures were successfully implemented, allowing registered parties to publicly declare direct donations as mandated by legislation.

Despite progress since its inception, the Commission continues to face significant challenges in fully implementing the PPFA/PFA. Budget constraints, staffing shortages, and changing

regulations have made implementation difficult. In a May 2022 report to the Portfolio Committee on Home Affairs, the IEC announced impending budget cuts totalling almost R800 million over a three-year period (excluding inflation). These cuts pose a significant risk to the IEC's effectiveness in numerous areas of its mandate, notably the oversight of political funding.

Budget cuts have compelled the IEC to cancel or curtail essential democratic activities, such as:

- Cancellation of the second weekend for voter registration for the 2024 provincial and national elections
- Voter education and outreach lacked adequate funding
- Cancellation of the Democracy Education Fieldworkers programme
- Jeopardised implementation of the Electoral Amendment Act
- Inability to expand staffing to meet increased responsibilities

The IEC faced significant budget constraints at a critical juncture – just as it was given new responsibilities in terms of the then-PPFA, in addition to adapting to electoral reform introduced by the Electoral Matters Amendment Act 14 of 2024 and preparations for the 2024 election.

The IEC's capacity to implement political funding oversight through compliance monitoring and enforcement is questionable due to limited resources and a small staff complement in the IEC's PFU, which are likely to compromise its effectiveness in monitoring and enforcing the PPFA/PFA. A well-funded oversight body is considered crucial for successful implementation of political funding legislation.

The IEC's implementation of the PPFA was designed as a cautiously phased approach. Upon the Act's enactment in January 2019, the Electoral Commission explained that Parliament and the National Treasury had foreseen a staged rollout starting on 1 April 2019, dependent on available resources and the Commission's ability to fulfil its duties. A phased rollout was planned, beginning with an electronic declaration system for parties and donors to report donations exceeding the threshold; this system was slated for completion by April 2019. Political parties and private donors received education and training about their obligations under the new Act as part of its implementation. The IEC's online declarations portal for parties appears to be a voter information portal. However, closer exploration leads to the declarations portal.¹ It is unclear whether this is a temporary system error and whether such a portal does in fact exist. Online disclosure platforms, especially those that enable real-time updating, can enhance the IEC's effectiveness and public awareness and trust (Jones, 2017).

¹ Clicking on the Political Funding tab at the top of the IEC's home page produces a drop-down list that includes the [Online Political Funding System](#) option. However, selecting it takes one to a voter registration page at <https://online.elections.org.za/MyIEC/account/login>. The IEC explained that logging in takes the user to the declarations portal. (Accessed 25 March 2025.)

The IEC's implementation capacity has been further tested by recent regulatory changes and legal challenges. A gap in the law emerged in 2024 when the Electoral Matters Amendment Act 14 of 2024 removed donation caps and disclosure requirements. A ruling by the Western Cape High Court reinstated the previous thresholds on 16 August 2024, resolving the situation. However, the IEC faced significant implementation challenges due to this regulatory uncertainty, needing to constantly adjust its systems, guidance and practice in response to evolving political dynamics.

2.2. The IEC's dual mandate: Electoral integrity and political finance regulation

Is it appropriate for the IEC to be mandated to both ensure free and fair elections, as well as political finance regulation? Does the latter mandate attract conflict and therefore undermine the necessary confidence in the election management body (EMB)?

2.2.1. Is it appropriate for the IEC to be mandated to ensure free and fair elections and political finance regulation?

The IEC's mandate is to ensure free and fair elections and regulate political finance, which involves balancing institutional capacity, independence, and the interconnected nature of these responsibilities. South Africa's electoral framework assigns these dual roles to the IEC, but their effectiveness depends on sufficient safeguards and strategic resource allocation. The dual mandate is theoretically appropriate given the connection between financial openness and election justice. However, its success depends on a proper budget, strengthened statutory protections for the IEC's independence, and a clear separation of administrative and regulatory functions.

2.2.2. The IEC's core mandate for free and fair elections

The IEC is constitutionally obligated to administer elections impartially, ensuring they are free from intimidation, transparently managed, and reflect voters' choices (IEC, n.d._a; IEC, n.d._b; IEC, n.d._c). Key mechanisms include:

- Voter roll management and equitable access to voting stations (IEC, n.d._a; IEC, n.d._b)
- Enforcement of electoral laws, including secrecy of voting and impartial administration (FW de Klerk Foundation, 2024.; IEC, n.d._c)
- Conflict mediation and collaboration with security clusters to mitigate risks (FW de Klerk Foundation, 2024.; ACE Project, n.d.)

2.2.3. Political finance regulation under the Electoral Commission

The PFA, like its predecessor the Political Party Funding Act (PPFA), gives the IEC broad regulatory authority over political financing in South Africa. According to My Vote Counts (n.d.), the IEC has

the authority to require political parties to publish all annual donations over R100,000. The Act also enables the IEC to prohibit foreign government contributions while allowing limited foreign funding for training and policy research (IEC, n.d.^d; My Vote Counts, n.d.).

However, the implementation of these provisions has revealed significant gaps. The disclosure threshold of R100,000 has been criticised as too high, potentially allowing substantial cumulative donations to remain undisclosed through strategic contributions splitting (Olver, Buthelezi & Brunette, 2017). Additionally, enforcement capacity remains a concern, with the IEC's quarterly disclosure reports showing uneven compliance among political parties (IEC, n.d.^f).

While the IEC has the right to audit party funds and impose penalties for infractions (My Vote Counts, n.d.; IEC, n.d.^d), the actual application of these powers has been limited. As of 2024, few substantial penalties have been imposed despite documented reporting irregularities, raising questions about whether the IEC fully has sufficient resources or political will to execute its regulatory mandate (OUTA, 2023). Moreover, the multi-source funding model creates a complex regulatory environment that further strains the IEC's monitoring capacity (IEC, n.d.^e).

2.2.4. Strengths of the Commission's dual mandate: Institutional benefits and international perspectives

South Africa's democratic processes are sustained by the IEC's dual responsibility for political finance regulation and electoral integrity. This arrangement provides numerous institutional benefits. Financial openness is a key basis for electoral integrity since it reduces the potential of vote buying and undue influence from affluent donors, resulting in free and fair elections (My Vote Counts, n.d.; Olver, Buthelezi & Brunette, 2017). As a constitutionally created independent agency, the IEC is particularly neutral, allowing it to implement regulatory standards without partisan bias or political intervention (FW de Klerk Foundation, 2024; LegalWise, n.d.). The Commission's practical capacity to carry out this dual duty is bolstered by its broad statewide office network and developed electoral monitoring mechanisms, which provide the infrastructure required to monitor compliance across the country (IEC, n.d.^a; IEC, n.d.^b).

International examples offer valuable perspectives for evaluating South Africa's approach. Several countries have enacted similar dual mandates, but their success varies greatly. Canada's system, with significant enforcement powers, successfully prosecuted the Conservative Party in the 'In and Out' scandal (Payton, 2011; McGregor & Maher, 2012), demonstrating that robust enforcement is possible but requires substantial investigative resources—something the IEC's budget constraints currently inhibit (OUTA, 2023).

Given similar post-colonial contexts and political dynamics, Kenya's experience is particularly relevant to South Africa. The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission's (IEBC) struggles with political interference (Muna & Otieno, 2020) highlight the importance of

strengthening the IEC's constitutional protections against political pressure, predominantly as it regulates the finances of ruling party members who control its budget allocations. Ghana's Electoral Commission faces capacity challenges that have hampered the implementation of even rudimentary financial reporting requirements (Nyarko, 2022; Penplusbytes, 2024). This parallels the IEC's situation, where the dual mandate stretches administrative resources across competing priorities.

Unlike Ghana, however, South Africa has established more sophisticated electronic disclosure systems—an advantage that could be leveraged with targeted technological investments. Australia's Electoral Commission emphasises transparency but has been criticised for relatively light enforcement (AEC, 2022). This offers a cautionary lesson for the IEC: transparency without consistent enforcement may create an illusion of accountability without substantive impact on political financing practices. These comparative cases suggest three crucial elements the IEC must secure to effectively execute its dual mandate: sustained political will across electoral cycles, unambiguous legislative authority to investigate and sanction non-compliance, and resource allocation proportionate to the complexity of its dual responsibilities.

2.2.5. Criticisms and challenges

The IEC confronts multiple significant challenges in executing its dual mandate. Budget constraints represent the most immediate threat to practical implementation. Recent cuts of R770 million over three years (OUTA, 2023) have forced difficult resource allocation decisions between electoral administration and financial regulation functions. These constraints manifest in practical limitations: inadequate staffing for comprehensive financial audits, insufficient technology infrastructure for sophisticated tracking of political financing patterns, and limited capacity for investigations when discrepancies are identified (Olver, Buthelezi & Brunette, 2017).

The inherently political nature of regulating party finances creates substantial institutional risks for the IEC. Investigations into potential violations by powerful political actors may trigger accusations of partisan bias, mainly when enforcement actions disproportionately affect specific parties (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, n.d.). This vulnerability could contaminate public perception of the IEC's electoral management function, undermining trust in election results—a concern amplified in South Africa's highly competitive multi-party environment (FW de Klerk Foundation, 2024).

Structural tensions exist between the regulatory and administrative functions assigned to the IEC. Regulatory effectiveness requires an adversarial posture toward non-compliant political parties, while electoral administration demands collaborative relationships with those same organisations (Olver, Buthelezi & Brunette, 2017). This dual relationship creates operational contradictions for IEC officials who must simultaneously partner with and police political parties, potentially compromising the effectiveness of both functions. Constitutional and legislative

frameworks provide insufficient safeguards for the IEC when executing its regulatory function. Unlike its electoral management role, which enjoys explicit constitutional protection, the IEC's political finance regulation mandate stems primarily from statutory authority that could be modified through ordinary legislative processes controlled by the regulated parties (Olver, Buthelezi & Brunette, 2017).

2.3. Private donations: Should the threshold and cap be changed?

Political parties have, since the inception of the PPFA in 2021, strained against the private funding constraints contained in the legislation.

Parliament took the opportunity to remove the donation threshold and annual donation cap when it amended the legislation to make provision for independent candidates when, in early 2024, the PPFA became the Political Funding Act (PFA). Parliament amended the Act to permit the President to set new limits following a resolution by Parliament. However, Parliament failed to adopt such a resolution before the 2024 general election. Civil society organisation My Vote Counts successfully applied to the Western Cape High Court to have the threshold and cap 'read into' the PFA pending a resolution by Parliament.

Responding to complaints that the threshold and cap were unfair and irrational (because they had not been based on any clear evidence-based criteria), Parliament initiated deliberations, including public hearings in order to correct this legislative error (PMG, 2024).

In an example of dissatisfaction with the fundraising constraints arising from the PPFA, the ANC Treasurer-General Ms Gwen Ramakgopa, reportedly proposed that political parties should be fully funded by the state (*IOL*, 2023; *Daily Maverick*, 2023). In parliamentary deliberations, some political parties have proposed that both the PFA's donation disclosure threshold and its annual donations cap should be substantially increased. ANC MP Faith Muthambi proposed doubling both the threshold and annual cap (*News24*, 2025; PMG, 2025).

ANC alliance partner, trade union federation Cosatu, opposes increasing the threshold, preferring that it should be entirely removed, 'so that all donations must be declared'. In its submission to the Portfolio Committee, Cosatu said –

"We strongly believe that all donations must be disclosed. To assist parties and donors who make such donations, consideration should be given to ensuring the reporting requirements are not administratively burdensome".

Cosatu is, however, in favour of doubling the limit on annual donations (*News24*, 2024; PMG, 2025).

The Southern African Catholic Bishop's Conference (SACBC) was in favour of retaining the existing threshold and cap, while My Vote Counts (MVC) favoured lowering both substantially, arguing in its submission that the R15 million limit is "unjustifiably high in the South African context". It explained that the high donations limit "creates the opportunity for political parties and independents to be beholden to a single large donor or donors. Wealthy donors are able to have an outsized influence over and above the ballot box. Recent history has shown how private interests, and capital can corrupt our political system. While disclosure creates transparency, to safeguard democracy, greater restriction is required to limit the ability of private interests to exert influence". MVC also wants the threshold to be lowered because 'knowing who funds a party is a key part of the voting calculus. The threshold limits the ability of the voter to know who funds a party, as well as the number of people financially supporting a party, which may be indicative of that party's level of support'. Therefore –

"Of enormous importance is that full disclosure will ensure that donors cannot donate just under the threshold to avoid disclosure. It will also ensure that there will be transparency when related entities may donate under the threshold to avoid disclosure" (*News24*, 2024; PMG, 2025).

DA MP Adrian Roos proposed retention of the current R15 million upper limit donations, adjusted for inflation. The same should apply to the disclosure threshold. He argued that it is 'the most suitable option', adding that 'in a country as unequal as South Africa, it would be problematic to use GDP-per capita or average income', which is another scenario developed by the PBO based on its research.

The EFF has previously also proposed raising the disclosure threshold to R1 million "to protect smaller parties and their funders from victimisation, isolation and undue scrutiny in South Africa's polarised environment". In its submission, the IFP proposed that the 'disclosure threshold should be R250 000 and the upper limit should be R25 000 000' (*News24*, 2024; PMG, 2025).

ActionSA chief whip Lerato Ngobeni reportedly said that "In our view, the threshold needs to be reconsidered in respect of the fact that South Africa decided that we are going to be a multi-party democracy. It doesn't make sense for the thresholds that are currently in play," she said, adding that they "actually muzzle new political parties that are maybe coming into play". She said that this doesn't mean there shouldn't be accountability; however, the current regime allows "a lot of nefariousness [to] go on", and that people are reportedly 'allowed' to manipulate the system. "From where we are sitting, we believe that the thresholds must be reviewed; they must be increased and not lowered, because lowering them is not feasible for political parties." She proposed that the [disclosure] threshold must be "much, much, much, much higher. We

would actually posit that anything below R500 000 is really not feasible for political parties, particularly emerging ones, like ourselves and others” (News24, 2024: PMG, 2025).

The Portfolio Committee on Home Affairs is required to formulate a proposed resolution for the National Assembly’s consideration in terms of Section 24(1)(a) of the Political Funding Act (2018). The resolution concerns upper limits on private donations and the disclosure threshold for private donations to political parties and independent candidates. The resolution should take into account the Act’s objectives, which ‘include enhancing transparency, reducing undue influence, levelling the playing field, promoting accountability, and strengthening democracy’ (PBO, 2025).

The Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) was asked by the Portfolio Committee on Home Affairs (PC: HA) to undertake research on whether there should be any changes to the donation disclosure threshold and the annual donations cap, and to identify evidence of comparative good practice that could provide guidance to the Committee in its deliberations. The PBO provided the Committee with a briefing on 4 February 2025 (PMG, 2025; PBO, 2025).

2.3.1. Main issues and proposals raised in the PBO presentation and in Committee deliberations

Donations caps

The upper limit on private donations from a single donor is currently R15 Million per financial year. No clear rationale was found for how this limit was determined in 2018 while Parliament was considering the initial PPF Bill. Adjusted for inflation, the would be around R21 million in 2024. When compared to international benchmarks, South Africa is an outlier with a high upper limit despite being a middle-income country.

Proposed scenarios for the upper limit

1. Retain the R15 million limit but adjust for inflation.
2. Base the limit on economic indicators (GDP per capita or average annual income).
3. Cap donations as a percentage of a donor’s annual income (e.g., 5%).
4. Limit donations to a percentage of a party’s income or previous election expenditure (e.g., 5%).

Arguments for increasing the limit

The ANC, Cosatu, the ANC-linked Progressive Business Forum and the EFF support raising the limit to accommodate rising campaign costs. Increased funding would help political parties to remain financially viable. The DA supports only an inflationary increase.

Arguments against increasing the limit

The IFP, My Vote Counts (MVC) and the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) oppose raising the limit. They argue that higher limits could increase wealthy donors' influence over politics and could reduce fairness in political competition.

Disclosure threshold for donations

The current threshold is R100,000. It was intended to balance transparency with administrative efficiency, i.e., avoiding an undue administrative burden on donors who may wish to donate smaller amounts and on political parties who must keep track. However, in comparison with relevant global practices, South Africa's threshold is low for a middle-income country.

Proposed scenarios for the disclosure threshold

1. Increase the threshold to match particular economic indicators (R122,000–R174,000 based on GDP per capita and average annual income).
2. Maintain the current threshold.
3. Require full disclosure of all donations, i.e., remove the threshold entirely.

Arguments in support of raising the threshold

The EFF and ANC support increasing the threshold to at least R1 million. They submit that it protects donors from political targeting and reduces the administrative burden on political parties. The DA supports only an inflationary increase.

Arguments against raising the threshold

COSATU and MVC argue for full disclosure of all donations. They submit that this will effectively prevent hidden financial influence in politics and will ensure greater transparency and accountability.

The PBO, correctly in our view, sees these private funding regulation reforms discussed above as part of a holistic package of mutually reinforcing reforms. The PBO presentation therefore also addressed important related issues, including public and private funding, expenditure caps and enhancing enforcement capacity. These relevant additional elements of the PBO presentation are therefore summarised below. Some of these issues will be dealt with in more detail in other sections of this literature review.

Public vs. private political funding in South Africa

Public funding of political parties exceeded R6.5 billion (2020/21–2023/24), while private donations totalled R559.7 million in the same period. Private funding increased sharply before the 2024 general election, with some parties receiving over R15 million in a single quarter.

Due to the reversion in the PFA to the previous public funding formula (of 90% proportional and 10% equitable),² and because the larger parties have well-known performance records and established donor relationships, they received significantly more funding than smaller and new parties, creating systemic imbalances.

Concerns raised

Public funding largely benefits established parties, limiting competition. A few donors (e.g., corporations and wealthy families) dominate political funding. There is a general lack of transparency in financial records of political parties. (In our view, this is largely because the IEC is unable to verify what donations parties may receive but do not disclose.)

Spending caps for political parties

The PBO correctly observed that the PFA makes no provision for any limit on how much political parties can spend. Those parties that successfully raise large amounts of money can run very expensive and expansive election campaigns, as well as maintain their sometimes extensive countrywide party infrastructure and operation between elections. (It should be added that this inequality makes it extremely difficult for independent candidates to compete.) Sixty-eight countries, including the USA, UK, Canada, and India, impose spending limits to ensure fairer elections. Spending caps can reduce corruption and prevent big donors from controlling elections.

2.3.2. Policy considerations

The PBO suggested that the Committee should consider introducing a spending cap to ensure electoral fairness. Ensuring parties' adherence to the cap despite temptations to outdo competitors, would require enhancing the IEC's capacity to strengthen financial auditing of political parties to ensure compliance and to prevent misuse of public funding for individual self-enrichment. (We suggest that the IEC also needs to enhance its coordination and collaboration with the DPSA and PSC to effectively monitor, prevent and act on the existing prohibition in the Public Service Regulations on partisan misuse of public assets for undue electoral benefit.)

Enforcement of political funding regulations

The PBO noted concerns regarding weak compliance with the political finance regulatory framework and the IEC's inadequate capacity to enforce them, both of which undermine the essential transparency objectives of the PFA. The PBO acknowledged that the IEC, as the responsible regulatory body, needs more resources and enhanced legal authority to enforce limits.

² This formula pertained before the adoption and implementation of the PPFA, which introduced a two-thirds and one-third formula, which

Recommendations included better public access to funding disclosures, including through the greater use of online technology for real-time disclosure and monitoring, which many countries already use, as well as educating the public on the importance and value of, and need for, political funding transparency.

PBO conclusion

- South Africa's political funding laws need reform to enhance transparency and fairness.
- The upper limit on donations and the disclosure threshold should be adjusted based on economic indicators.
- Stronger enforcement mechanisms are needed to prevent undue donor influence.
- Introducing spending caps could level the playing field for smaller parties (PBO and PMG, 2025).

On 14 March 2025, the PBO provided the Committee with a summary of 'key considerations' and its recommendations. The relevant extracts are quoted below.

'...2. Key considerations for decision-making

- *Transparency & accountability*: Balancing donor confidentiality with public access to funding sources.
- *Preventing undue influence*: Capping donations to limit disproportionate influence by wealthy donors.
- *Fair political competition*: Ensuring smaller parties have a chance to compete fairly.
- *Economic adjustments*: Considering inflation and campaign costs in setting limits.

3. Recommendations for upper limits on private donations

- The current limit (R15 million per donor per year) is considered high for a middle-income country like South Africa.
- International comparisons suggest that limits should align with GDP per capita or average income.
- Proposed scenarios for upper limit:
 1. Adjust current R15 million for inflation (approximately R21 million in 2024).
 2. Link the limit to GDP per capita (R122,000) or average wage (R174,000)—for example, setting the cap at 100 times the average wage (~R17 million).
 3. Set donation limits as a percentage of donor income (e.g., 5%) to prevent excessive influence.
 4. Cap a single donor's contribution at 5% of a party's total income or previous election expenditure.

4. Recommendations for the disclosure threshold

- The current threshold (R100,000 per donation) is viewed as potentially too low or too high, depending on the transparency goals.
- Proposed scenarios for the threshold:
 1. Increase to align with GDP per capita (R122,000) or average wage (R174,000) to balance transparency and administrative burden.
 2. Maintain R100,000 but adjust periodically for inflation.
 3. Full disclosure of all donations to enhance transparency, as practiced in some countries.

5. Other policy considerations

- *Introducing spending caps:* Many democracies limit total election spending to ensure fair competition. South Africa could consider this.
- *Stronger enforcement:* Regulatory bodies (e.g., IEC) should have more resources and legal authority to enforce donation limits and reporting requirements.
- *Leveraging technology:* Online disclosure platforms can enhance transparency and reduce corruption risks (PBO, 2025b).'

At the time of this literature review, it remains to be seen whether the Committee will support the entire package recommended by the PBO, and which economic indicators it will consider relevant when recommending to the National Assembly the any revisions to the threshold and cap.

2.4. Political funding regulatory regime: An income and/or an expenditure focus?

Regulating political financing is crucial to mitigate corruption, promote equitable competition among political parties and enhance voter trust in free and fair elections. Research indicates that income- and expenditure-oriented regulatory systems seek to mitigate excessive influence from affluent donors and guarantee that political competition remains untainted by financial inequalities (van Biezen, 2003; Scott & McLoughlin, 2014). Effective legislation promotes transparency by mandating the disclosure of donations and expenditures, discouraging corrupt behaviours (International IDEA, 2020).

In South Africa, the PPFA (now the PFA) implemented significant income regulation, marking a notable shift from South Africa's previously unregulated terrain akin to the United States' unregulated private contributions model (after the *Buckley v Valeo* and *Citizens United* decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court). Nonetheless, obstacles persist in enforcement and transparency, especially regarding the IEC's enforcement capabilities (Gerber, 2025).

Political finance rules often emphasise two primary approaches, viz., income regulation and expenditure regulation. Both methods seek to guarantee equitable and transparent political processes; however, they address distinct facets of political financing.

2.4.1. Income-focused regulatory approaches

Income-based restrictions aim to address the origins of political financing, endeavouring to curtail the impact of affluent contributors and mitigate the potential for corruption or undue influence on the recipients' policy positions. These approaches typically incorporate –

- **Donation bans:** Prohibiting contributions from specific sources considered potentially harmful to democratic processes, such as foreign entities, government contractors, or anonymous donors (Ohman, 2012; My Vote Counts, 2023;)
- **Contribution limits:** Capping amounts donors can contribute to parties or candidates (Ohman, 2012)
- **Disclosure requirements:** Mandating transparency about funding sources (My Vote Counts, 2023)

Transparency International's global analysis shows that most OECD countries limit donation amounts from natural and legal persons. Citing research by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IIDEA), the report finds that, among OECD countries, 84% ban anonymous donations, 73% prohibit foreign donations and 70% ban donations from government contractors or government-owned corporations (France, 2023). Only 39% implement general caps per donor, indicating that bans on specific funding sources are more widespread than universal donation limits (Porat, 2021).

The rationale behind income-focused regulation is primarily to prevent undue influence from wealthy donors and special interests. As Yee-Fui Ng (cited in Transparency International's report) argues, "caps on political donations are a crucial method of upholding political equality by limiting the influence of wealthy individuals, unions, and corporations" (France, 2023).

2.4.2. Expenditure-focused regulatory approaches

Expenditure-based restrictions, conversely, seek to limit campaign spending, thereby diminishing inequalities among parties and candidates. These approaches typically include –

- **Spending caps:** Limiting total campaign expenditures (Ohman, 2012)
- **Specific expenditure restrictions:** Prohibiting certain types of campaign spending (Ohman, 2012)
- **Reimbursement systems:** Providing state reimbursement for eligible campaign expenses (Ohman, 2012)

Expenditure limits aim to level the playing field and moderate campaign costs (ACE Project, n.d). Research has shown that limits on overall spending increase competitiveness and reduce incumbency advantage (Brobery, Pons & Tricaud, 2022).

Globally, expenditure limits vary considerably in design. They may consist of "an absolute sum per candidate or party (such as in the UK), a certain amount relative to a statutory yardstick such as the minimum wage (as in Portugal or the Russian Federation), while in France and Spain, the maximum sum is fixed depending on the number of inhabitants in the constituency" (van Biezen, 2003).

A combination of the two approaches can also be adopted, with expenditure calculations used to verify the accuracy of income disclosures.

2.4.3. Regional variations in regulatory approaches

Africa has fewer examples of comprehensive political finance regulation than worldwide averages. According to IIDEA data, just nine (20%) of 44 African countries limit campaign donations, while only ten (22%) limit political party spending (Check et al., 2019). This regulatory void provides the potential for financial dominance over political processes.

Most private funding in African countries comes from four primary sources: "party membership fees, corporate donations, foreign donations, and self-funding" (Check et al., 2019). Membership dues are the most prevalent source of private finance, but in impoverished areas, they cannot maintain campaign operations.

Kenya passed the *Election Campaign Financing Act in 2013*, creating a structure governing contributions and spending. Under this Act, the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) limits "total contributions; contributions from a single source; paid-up media coverage; and any loan forming part of a contribution" (Muna & Otieno, 2020). While the regulatory framework appears to be thorough, execution remains a challenge. The IEBC limited external contributions to 20% of campaign funds, but "no clear measures have been proposed to disclose such sources for public scrutiny" (Muna & Otieno, 2020). Referring to insights by Ohman, "most countries require financial reporting which is not conducted, despite it being the best method to ensure transparency" (Muna & Otieno, 2020)

A comparison of Tanzania and Uganda demonstrates how political settings influence campaign financing patterns and regulatory requirements. According to research, "presidential campaign costs in Uganda, where elite fragmentation is considerable, increased significantly in the election cycles of the 2010s compared to Tanzania" (Khisa et al, 2023). Uganda's campaign financing environment highlights how political fragmentation raises the cost of politics: "Running for Parliament in Uganda has become quite pricey, while presidential campaign

spending is exorbitant compared to Tanzania. This is partly due to the weakening of Uganda's ruling party and the fracture of the ruling coalition, which necessitates more money to fuel the patronage apparatus" (Khisa et al., 2023). Across the two countries, "the ruling party far outspends the combined opposition," leading to a "hugely skewed campaign finance landscape [with] grave implications for the struggle for democracy, the quality of elections, and the state of good governance" (Khisa et al., 2023).

Notably, African countries face substantial hurdles when establishing political financing legislation, including non-compliance, limited transparency, third-party interference and patronage politics. A few reported examples include –

- **Non-compliance:** In Nigeria, "only two of 23 parties filed annual reports in 2011" (Ohman, 2016).
- **Limited transparency:** In Rwanda, "no reporting during campaigns is necessary, and candidates do not have to report at all" (Ohman, 2016).
- **Third-party interference:** In Nigeria, billboards promoting presidential candidate Goodluck Jonathan purported to be funded by organisations such as "Nigerians for Clean Air", concealing the real funding sources (Ohman, 2016).
- **Patronage politics:** The high campaign costs in many African countries foster patron-client ties between contributors and politicians.

Similar challenges to developing appropriate financing regulations exist in other global south regions. For instance, in Latin America, countries frequently limit the revenue and expenditure components of political funding, focusing on limiting foreign influence. As International IDEA puts it, "given the long history of foreign interference in domestic political affairs in the region, many countries have taken steps to limit foreign donations to political parties and candidates" (Andía & Hamada, 2019). Regulatory regimes in Latin America typically include –

- Bans on foreign donations (widely distributed over the region)
- 74% of countries prohibit contributions from government-owned enterprises.
- There are less stringent laws for corporate donations (just seven countries control both types of donations).
- Mixed approaches to donations from firms with government contracts (regulated in 55-58% of countries).

Asia's political finance systems have unique issues due to "the intertwined nature of business-government relationships, political parties' informal bookkeeping practices, unrealistic regulations, and procedures and regulations that favour the ruling parties" (Möbrand et al., 2019).

Most Asian countries have at least one consequence for infractions, with financial fines being the most common, followed by criminal penalties. However, enforcement varies greatly, with nations such as "Bhutan, Cambodia, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka [being] the only countries in Asia that do not consider these types of sanctions for violations of funding regulations" (Mobrand et al., 2019).

2.4.4. Recent innovations and future directions

Monitoring expenditure can be challenging, especially with the rapid rise of digital electoral advertising, which is almost entirely unregulated (IIDEA, 2020; Electoral Reform Society, 2019). However, requiring and enabling real-time online disclosures of both income and expenditures can assist, as the case of Colombia demonstrates (Bosso et al, 2014).

As political campaigning advances online, governments adjust legislation to meet digital spending. Latvia has led the way in this area, mandating "online media advertisers to publish price lists and discount policies" as well as "keeping all records of campaign advertisement purchases" (Agrawal, 2022). There is some similarity here with the Real411 Platform and PAdRe created by the IEC and Media Monitoring Africa.

A significant rising trend is "mainstreaming political finance regulations into an overall anti-corruption framework" (Hamada & Agrawal, 2020). This comprehensive approach recognises that political finance reform cannot succeed in isolation and must be combined with broader governance improvements.

In this context, it is beneficial to combine monitoring of both income and expenditure, as the latter can help verify income (especially donations) disclosures by parties and candidates. If the general scale of expenditure is not approximately equivalent to disclosed and reported donations, that can provide an indication that disclosures are likely to be inaccurate.

2.5. Do the benefits of private funding outweigh the risks?

Private funding of political parties and candidates remains a central issue in global discussions around democratic integrity. There is growing scrutiny of the advantages and drawbacks of private political fundraising, particularly in contexts where institutional weaknesses exacerbate existing vulnerabilities. This examination considers an important question: Do the benefits of private financing for democratic participation and political innovation outweigh its potential to distort representation and undermine electoral integrity?

Private donations have traditionally underpinned political mobilisation, allowing parties to connect with supporters and fund campaigns. Private funding is also a recognised form of the constitutional rights of freedom of expression and association. Private donations create

“linkages between parties and their grassroots supporters”, enabling them to be sensitive to local issues instead of depending entirely on state funding (van Biezen, 2003). Private donations enable parties to distribute funds flexibly, unlike strict conditions often associated with public funding (s.7 of the PFA) based on election results. For example, Kenya's 2013 Election Campaign Financing Act allows parties to use private cash for voter engagement in underserved areas, promoting diversity (My Vote Counts, 2017a). Similarly, in Ghana, private donations allow smaller parties to compete with established incumbents (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, n.d.). Public funding frequently creates administrative obligations, such as onerous auditing standards that under-resourced parties struggle to meet. Private sponsorship, when transparent, doesn't have these constraints (although parties and individual candidates and representatives are required to account for all private donations – s.12 and s.12A of the PFA). Botswana's lack of state funding drives political parties to innovate through crowdfunding and community activities, which enhance local networks (My Vote Counts, 2017b).

According to the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network (n.d.), relying solely on public funding may face taxpayer pushback, as voters may object to sponsoring political bodies they disagree with. Furthermore, public finance methods may unintentionally support the status quo by favouring established parties and impeding the rise of new political forces.

In 2024, South African private funding disclosures reached R364.2 million during a nine-month period, with peak donation activity occurring in the election quarter of April–June 2024. This figure excludes donations below R100,000, which can represent substantial amounts, as evidenced by previous years' data (My Vote Counts, 2024).

As an example of how private funding can strengthen under-represented voices, opposition movements in South Africa were traditionally supported by membership dues and modest donations throughout the apartheid era (Olver, Buthelezi, & Brunette, 2017). While established political parties receive most private funding, emerging political organisations such as Rise Mzansi and Change Starts Now have begun attracting similar funding levels, suggesting an evolution in the political landscape (My Vote Counts, 2024).

Research by the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) examining South Africa's 2019 elections further demonstrates how financial resources—both private and public—were instrumental in allowing parties to execute fundamental activities such as campaign logistics and voter mobilisation efforts (Ndamase, 2020). As van Biezen (2003) suggests, private funding increases political participation by enabling individuals and organisations to support parties that reflect their values, thereby promoting civic engagement. Similarly, The Organisation of European Communities emphasises that private financing diminishes reliance on state resources, thus hindering governments from manipulating public funds to distort political competition (OSCE, 2016).

The current literature demonstrates that although private funding presents clear advantages—such as grassroots engagement, operational flexibility, and decreased reliance on state resources—these benefits are considerably offset by potential risks, including corruption, undue influence, and inequity. The prevalence of these risks is notably significant in Africa and the Global South, where institutional vulnerabilities facilitate the growth of patronage networks and the influence of foreign entities (My Vote Counts, 2017b, 2023; Porat, 2021).

A balanced hybrid approach that combines regulated private contributions with public financing appears to be the most effective solution. Extensive literature supports regulated hybrid models, as exemplified in South Africa's PFA.

Robust regulatory frameworks should integrate various complementary strategies. South Africa's PFA requires quarterly disclosures for donations exceeding R100,000; however, there are notable gaps in implementation (My Vote Counts, 2023). Broadening these requirements to encompass intra-party campaigns, as suggested in the aftermath of the CR17 scandal, may effectively tackle some current loopholes (Corruption Watch, 2019). Donor diversification strategies, such as Burkina Faso's gender parity incentives that indirectly encourage grassroots fundraising, can mitigate reliance on affluent elites, though there are still insufficient checks and balances to mitigate corruption (Trans-Saharan Elections Project, n.d.; Magolowondo, Falguera, & Matsimbe, 2012). Latvia's system is another valuable example, integrating donation caps, expenditure limits and state reimbursements for compliant parties—striking a balance between flexibility and accountability while diminishing dependence on any singular funding source (Magolowondo, Falguera, & Matsimbe, 2012; Ministry of Justice of Latvia, 2019; KNAB, 2024).

2.6. Political funding and gender equality: Gender parity and women's representation

Political funding, gender parity and women's representation are increasingly gaining attention within the scholarly and policy spaces that shape electoral systems and representation (Ballington, 2003; Ohman, 2018; Roy, 2025). It is widely accepted that women's political representation is worryingly low (Sidhu and Meena, 2007). Globally, women hold only 26.5 % of parliamentary seats and 22.9% of ministerial positions (Roy, 2025). This is worrying, especially considering that women make up approximately half of the global population. Indeed, Mechkova (2017) observes that women exercise considerably less political power than men. It is not surprising, therefore, that Roy (2025) found that it will take 169 years to achieve gender parity in women's political representation. This even though, as Roy (2025) found,

When women hold political power, economies grow. A 10-percentage point increase in women's parliamentary representation is associated with a 0.7% percentage point increase in GDP growth. Countries with greater female political representation consistently implement policies that support gender-equal labour markets, such as paid

family leave, pay transparency and childcare infrastructure. These policies don't just benefit women; they increase workforce participation, boost productivity and fuel economic expansion.

Despite significant advances in many parts of the world, women's representation remains disproportionately low (Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), 2020). Numerous factors drive women's under-representation in politics. This includes structural barriers like gender values, traditional gender roles, discrimination, and norms that guide societal expectations on women's political participation (IPU, 2020a; George, 2018; Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Brechenmacher and Hubbard, 2020). Indeed, George (2018) observed that:

In its simplest form, women's ability to have their voices heard as voters has long been shaped by gender norms (alongside other factors such as wealth, race and ethnicity). For example, prevailing norms about women's family responsibilities denied them their basic voting rights worldwide for centuries. Norm change, reflected in today's total (formal) global enfranchisement of women in every country that holds elections (except the Vatican), with Saudi Arabia most recently giving women the vote in 2015, has amplified women's voices in politics.

As Childs and Krook (2006) argue, political systems often exhibit gendered biases that place women at a disadvantage, particularly in male-dominated political parties and structures. Here we find that in addition to having to navigate finding adequate resources to support political campaigns, women must also navigate harmful gender norms that undermine their acceptance as capable and worthy political candidates and leaders. Indeed, UN Women (2024) note that "harmful norms and gender-based violence hinder women's political rights, and stereotypes in the media perpetuate the idea that women are less legitimate and capable leaders than men". In this context, it becomes increasingly difficult for women to enter party politics and build the necessary networks for political advancement (Schwindt-Bayer, 2010). Moreover, women's representation in political offices often lags due to financial barriers, with women candidates frequently having less access to funding networks and resources compared to their male counterparts (Kittilson, 2006; Piaget and Guo, 2025; Harry, 2024, Agrawal, 2022; Agrawal and Hamada, 2021). This disparity in funding can hinder women's electoral success, reinforcing existing gender inequalities in political system. Indeed, Agrawal (2022) notes that

Financial barriers, that is, insufficient access to political finance, act as an additional deterrent for women and other historically marginalized groups to fully participate in politics and public life. Women frequently have less access than men to the resources needed to successfully seek a party nomination or stand in an election. In many cases, men are also more likely to benefit from financial resources that are gained through moneyed networks and credit, and political clientelism. In developing countries, in particular, the

inability to pay even modest candidate registration fees can exclude women from the election process. In many countries around the world, several targeted political finance measures have been designed and adopted by governments, political parties, and private entities to remove these financial barriers and level the playing field for women.

While there is general recognition that political funding plays a significant role in addressing the gender gap in political representation (Kittilson, 2006), the gendered nature of political funding undermines true gender parity and women's political representation. Financial resources are critical for ensuring that women have the same opportunities as men to compete in elections and access the necessary resources and instruments for successful campaigns (Kittilson, 2006, Muriaas, Mazur, and Hoard, 2022). Some studies also suggest that political parties with adequate funding can support women's candidacies by providing campaign resources, staffing and logistical support (Bauer, 2018). However, as Macguire (2018) notes, women experience a higher rate of financial barriers to their electoral campaigns. Here, societal inequality and gendered stereotypes play a role where "...women were much less likely than men to have access to family finances" (Macguire, 2018). For this reason, Schwindt-Bayer (2010) conclude that women are "...gaining voice, but not power, in politics" (emphasis added). She observes that:

Women in office face an environment where the male majority has incentives to protect its long-standing dominance and political power. Because of this, women will not gain access to important political resources, such as prestigious committee assignments, leadership posts, or sponsorship of diverse types of legislation. Instead, they will be marginalised into less important legislative activities and work on traditionally "feminine" policy issues...[T]his marginalisation will be worse in political settings where electoral rules encourage party-centred rather than personalistic legislative behaviour. In party-centred systems, party leaders who are usually male have substantial influence over the distribution of legislative resources making it easier for them to sideline women. Overall...women are increasingly present in politics, but equality is incomplete because institutional obstacles hinder women's attainment of real political power.

Quotas and affirmative action policies have been introduced in many countries to address gender imbalances and ensure women's inclusion in political processes (Brenchenmacher and Hubbard, 2020; Commission for Gender Equality, 2023; Commission for Gender Equality, 2013). However, as Sidhu and Meena (2007) conclude, financial resources are a prerequisite to compete politically. As such, the "...intersection between gender and electoral financing thus requires concerted attention" (Sidhu and Meena, 2007). If not, the gains made in securing quotas for equal representation may be ineffective as, due to patterns of gender discrimination, women traditionally have more limited resources than their male counterparts (Sidhu and

Meena, 2007). Thus, for Sidhu and Meena (2007), reforming campaign financing laws is a necessary first step towards redressing gender inequities.

While, as Dahlerup (2006) notes, gender quotas have significantly increased women's representation in parliaments, there is also increasing recognition of the need to advance gender-targeted public funding. This is because, as Kanthak and Krause (2012) note, quotas can be a form of tokenism where women are at the table but have no real influence or voice in shaping policy, politics and society. For this reason, there is increasing recognition that public political funding linked to specific gender-targeted activities can have a deeper influence in reshaping gender representation and parity than merely quotas (Ohman2018).

The regulation of political party funding is crucial for maintaining fairness in the political process. Several scholars (Baker, 1996; Schwindt-Bayer, 2010) have argued that transparent funding mechanisms are necessary to prevent corruption and ensure that all parties have equal access to resources. However, political funding systems often perpetuate inequalities, particularly in relation to gender, as women candidates and women-led parties may face challenges in securing adequate financial resources (Bauer, 2018). Through reforms such as gender-responsive political financing or gender-targeted public funding, the aim to create a more equitable environment for women to compete in elections could be more realisable (Tripp, 2017; Ohman, 2018; Sidhu and Meena, 2007). These policies could include financial incentives for parties that field a balanced number of male and female candidates, and funding schemes that assist women in overcoming the financial barriers to entering politics. To this effect, Sidhu and Meena (2007) note:

Public financing can take the form of direct financial contributions, or more indirect options such as free airtime on television and radio stations. It can include incentives such as tax credits or matching grants to stimulate grass roots membership. Funds may be targeted to specific activities, such as capacity development, used for campaigning or applied towards operational expenses. They can be allocated in different ways, such as according to votes cast or parliamentary representation, through the distribution of equal amounts, or through a combination of methods.

The necessary ingredients, however, are political will and societal directives. As Ballinton (2007) observes:

We know that political parties are at the heart of all democracies and that they have strategic responsibility to prepare and select candidates to stand for election. We know that a continuing challenge for political parties is to ensure that they are representative of the different groups and distinct sectors of society. We also know that women remain significantly under-represented in legislatures...and that there are several barriers that

women candidates confront enroute to political power. There are strong arguments articulated, especially in developing democracies, that electoral finance is an increasing obstacle to women's election to parliament.

Rwanda has become a global example of how political will, legal reforms and financial support can create an environment where women are not only included but thrive in political spaces. Rwanda's success in achieving gender parity is largely attributed to a combination of constitutional quotas, affirmative action policies and targeted public funding for women's political participation (IPU, 2020; Kumar and Sunny, 2025). Key to Rwanda's success was not just legislating gender quotas as a means of "addressing gender parity". Rather, a system of gender quotas (legislated at 30%), coupled with political will and a legislative framework, and backed up with financial support and public funding, particularly introducing public funding mechanisms for political parties that field female candidates, have all contributed to recreating pathways to power for women in the country (Dutta, 2023a; UN Women, n.d.; Government of Rwanda, 2023). The integration of gender-sensitive policies and public funding for women candidates has transformed the political playing field in the country, creating conditions conducive for women to not only increase their political presence in institutions, but to take on stronger leadership roles in political institutions. As a result, Rwanda has the highest percentage of women in parliament in the world, with women holding over 60% of seats in the Chamber of Deputies (IPU, 2020).

Concomitantly, the case of India presents a complex case study of gender parity and political funding. With the absence of political will and a patriarchal political culture, women have unequal access to resources compared to men.

Political parties tend to distribute more resources to men than women, most notably in high-profile constituencies. Women do not have access to the same political networks, financial resources and donor support as their male counterparts (Bauer, 2018; Pasricha, 2024; Ghosh, 2022). Women, therefore, face greater difficulties in mounting political campaigns. The question of gender quotas is also highly sensitive and have been inconsistently enforced where quotas are available to women at the local level since 1993, but not the state level. (Brechenmacher, 2023; Ioanes, 2023). Women won a major legislative victory with the adoption of the *Women's Reservation Bill* in 2023 in terms of which 33 % of seats in the national assembly is reserved for women (UN Women, 2023). However, deeply rooted cultural and societal norms that view political leadership as a male-dominated space permeate India's political society. In addition to financial barriers, women also face violence, intimidation, and traditional gender roles when they participate in political life (Chowdhury, 2013).

However, further research is needed to explore the effectiveness of political funding reforms, particularly in developing and highly unequal countries where gender parity remains a

significant challenge. There is a need to understand how political funding should be designed for a specific context like South Africa, and/or different local governments and councils, to promote gender equity and maintain democratic fairness. This will include targeted research with a focus on women, politics and money to determine the barriers to inclusion, from both a norms and values perspective, as well as financial obstacles, and how targeted public funding for gender inclusivity in politics can best be achieved. Indeed, India demonstrates that while incremental progress and victories for gender equality in politics is important, gendered barriers to full political participation persist. Funding and access to resources is critical in supporting women political candidacy to advance gender parity, representation, and equality.

The relationship between political funding and gender equality is critically important given that financial resources, and access to these resources, play a significant role in securing representation and political office. Funding affects women's ability to effectively compete in elections, secure political positions, and access the necessary resources to run their campaigns. Research has shown that women often have less access to political funding, compared to men, most notably in political systems where political funding is largely dependent on private donations. These trends are often shaped by traditional networks, which are often male dominated.

Political funding is not gender neutral. It is highly gendered and political. It can act as a barrier to women's full inclusion in political life and political representation. It re-creates gendered economic dependency through political disparity (Piagt and Guo, 2025). Indeed,

...having fewer financial resources puts women overall on the 'outsider track' and in a disadvantaged position from the get-go, which in countries like the US, can lead women to be "more strategic" and self-selecting about the races they run in the first place. This is especially worrying in a context of electoral processes flooded by hyper-masculine leadership tropes running on platforms of economic scarcity (Piagt and Guo, 2025).

These gendered disparities in access to resources reinforce the underrepresentation of women in politics and contribute to a cycle where political power remains concentrated in male hands. As George (2018) notes,

Women's ability to engage politically both within and beyond the voting booth – particularly as community organisers and elected officials – is often shaped by norms that drive wider social structures. There is an important reality to face: women carry a 'triple burden' of reproductive, productive and community work. This is, in turn, shaped by gendered social norms that bolster expectations about women's roles and that influence women's ability to run for office and participate politically.

Targeted and gender-responsive public funding mechanisms, gender mainstreaming, and quotas can collectively work to break down gender barriers to political participation. It can also advance the recreation of political participation by breaking down systemic, institutional and societal barriers that impact women's ability to speak for themselves and challenge gender-based discrimination. It is widely accepted that women's participation in politics, decision-making and leadership is positively correlated with societal wellness, economic development, and improved human wellbeing.

2.7. Multi-Party Democracy Fund: How can it be more attractive and effective?

The Multi-Party Democracy Fund (MPDF), established under South Africa's Political Party Funding Act, 2018 (PPFA), represents a significant effort to strengthen the country's multiparty democracy by providing a neutral funding mechanism for political parties and independent candidates. The Electoral Commission (IEC) is mandated by the Act to administer the MPDF. The main aim of creating the MPDF was to reduce the perception of undue influence that often accompanies direct party donations while promoting equitable financial support for all represented parties (IEC, 2023a). However, despite the good intentions of the MPDF as envisaged by the Act, the Fund has (until a single recent instance) experienced challenges in attracting significant contributions. This has raised questions about its design, incentives, and broader appeal. For example, it was reported in the media that the fund attracted less than R5000 during the third quarter of 2022 (*Times Live*, 2022). In its 2022/23 annual report, the IEC reported that the MPDF fund received R2.5 million from private donations during the last quarter of the financial year. However, this is insignificant when compared to the R300 million in public funds allocated to the RPPF under the Second Adjustments Appropriation Act for the year.

2.7.1. Challenges facing the MPDF

To understand how the MPDF could become more attractive and effective, it is necessary to discuss the core challenges faced by the Fund.

Many challenges were identified in the IEC report by the HSRC (IEC, 2023a). In the report, it was highlighted that one of the primary challenges is the lack of direct incentives for donors. The IEC also noted a tension in terminology and incentives to donate. Those who donate directly to political parties are referred to as 'donors', whereas those who contribute to the MPDF are described as 'contributors' (perhaps a less powerful-sounding term) due to their funding of 'democracy' as a whole. Unlike direct party donations, contributions to the MPDF do not allow donors to influence specific party agendas, which also diminishes their perceived value (IEC, 2023a). Many donors are also reluctant to support a fund that distributes their contributions to parties whose ideologies or policies they may oppose. The monies in the Fund must be distributed among parties that hold at least one seat in the National Assembly. This implies that

a portion of every donation will inevitably go to parties the donor may not support. Additionally, the absence of any tax benefits or other financial incentives further reduces the fund's appeal, especially when compared to corporate social investment (CSI) initiatives, which often offer tangible returns and tax advantages (IEC, 2023a).

The allocation formula for the MPDF in terms of the PPFA was that it distributed funds 67% proportionally and 33% equitably among represented parties (IEC, 2023:15). This has changed with the enactment of the Electoral Matters Amendment Act 14 of 2024 (EMAA), which amended the PPFA, including so that it has become the Political Funding Act (PFA). The EMAA has revised the allocation formula from the Fund so that it has now reverted to the pre-PPFA formula 90: 10.³ This formula was changed to the more equitable 67: 33 by the PPFA because it was agreed that the 90: 10 formula unduly favoured incumbency and larger parties. The reversion to the old formula is likely to be an additional disincentive for potential contributors to the Fund.

Another significant barrier is the limited awareness and promotion of the MPDF. Despite the IEC's efforts to promote the fund, many potential donors—both individuals and even corporations—remain unaware of its existence or its role in strengthening democracy (IEC, 2023a). This lack of visibility is compounded by an individual and corporate cultural preference for direct party donations, which are often seen as a way to gain influence or align with specific political agendas. In South Africa's relatively young democracy, many donors are more inclined to support individual parties they feel a close connection to, rather than contributing to a fund that supports the broader democratic process (IEC, 2023a).

According to the IEC (2023a) report, corporate donors, in particular, face a dilemma when considering contributions to the MPDF. Businesses often prefer to invest in CSI projects, such as building schools or community centres, where they can see tangible outcomes and build goodwill within specific communities. In contrast, donating to the MPDF offers no immediate commercial benefits or visible results, making it a harder sell for corporate decision-makers. As one elections practitioner noted, contributing to the MPDF requires a cultural shift, where donors prioritise the long-term benefits of democracy over their immediate commercial interests (IEC, 2023a).

2.7.2. Guidance for enhancing the MPDF's effectiveness

The IEC 2023 report provides useful guidance on addressing these challenges and enhancing the MPDF's appeal. First and foremost, introducing financial incentives, such as tax deductibility for contributions, may significantly boost donor participation. The IEC (2023a) reported that the institution has already begun discussions with the South African Revenue Service (SARS) to

³ Regulation 2 in terms of the PFA.

explore this possibility, but that progress has been slow. Concluding these negotiations and proceeding to secure tax benefits for MPDF contributions will align the fund with other charitable initiatives and may make it more attractive to both individual and corporate donors. In addition to financial incentives, reframing the messaging around the MPDF could help shift perceptions. Campaigns that emphasise the Fund's role in safeguarding democratic institutions—which underpin economic stability and social cohesion—could resonate with donors who value long-term societal benefits (The Presidency, 2024). Transparency and impact reporting could also build trust, with the IEC publishing annual reports detailing how MPDF funds were used by political parties, such as for policy development or voter education initiatives (IEC, 2023a).

Furthermore, considering an adjustment of the allocation formula could also address some donor concerns. For example, allowing donors to allocate a portion of their contribution (say, 20%) to specific parties while the remainder follows the standard formula could balance democratic equity with donor agency (IEC, 2023a). It is suggested that this would be in addition to a reintroduction of the more equitable 67: 33 formula. Alternatively, introducing a tiered allocation model that prioritises smaller parties could ensure greater diversity and address concerns that the current formula disproportionately benefits dominant parties (IEC, 2023a). The MPDF's effectiveness could also be improved through active engagement between the IEC, political parties and corporate stakeholders. Encouraging parties to promote the Fund to their support bases, framing it as a collective effort to reduce reliance on opaque donations, could also foster greater political buy-in (IEC, 2023a). Similarly, partnering with industry associations to position MPDF contributions as part of broader ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) commitments could attract corporate donors (IEC, 2023a).

Moreover, giving greater prominence and publicity to contributors to the Fund could satisfy corporate contributors' likely need to demonstrate to shareholders and other stakeholders that there has been some reputational or 'brand' benefit or value for their socially responsible conduct.

2.7.3. *International practices*

Although not many countries have successfully implemented funding mechanisms to regulate the transparency of donations to political parties, some lessons can be learned from existing international best practices. Both Sweden and Germany are known for their well-regarded and mature public party financing systems, which effectively combine state funding with stringent transparency rules. These systems are designed to ensure political pluralism and financial stability for parties while minimising the influence of private donations, particularly from large corporations, on political decisions. In Sweden, state funding is allocated based on the number of votes a party receives (not dissimilar to South Africa) in parliamentary elections, and strict transparency rules mandate the disclosure of donations and financial transactions (Hagavi,

2018). Similarly, Germany's system includes state contributions and regulations that require the full disclosure of donations exceeding a certain threshold, reinforcing the aim of reducing undue private influence (Duttab, 2023).

Transparency is central to systems found in South Africa, Germany and Sweden, although enforcement differs. Importantly, Germany and Sweden also rely on independent electoral authorities (Federal Returning Office, Swedish Electoral Authority) to monitor compliance, similar to South Africa's IEC which oversees stringent disclosure rules.

On tax benefits for political donations, India's Electoral Trusts offer some lessons applicable to South Africa. The Indian government offers tax benefits for political donations through 'Electoral Trusts', which are designed to promote transparency in political funding (Mundra, 2024). Electoral Trusts are nonprofit organisations that receive contributions from individuals and corporations and distribute these funds to political parties, ensuring that donations are made in a transparent and accountable manner. These contributions are eligible for a 100% deduction under Section 80GGC of the Income Tax Act (Mundra, 2024). This implies that individuals and corporations can reduce their taxable income by donating to these Trusts. The Electoral Trust model ensures transparency in the flow of funds to political parties, reducing the likelihood of opaque donations in elections and is regulated by the Election Commission of India.

2.7.4. MPDF's visibility and accessibility

From the IEC (2023a) study, enhancing the visibility and accessibility of the MPDF was regarded as crucial. Developing a user-friendly digital platform for contributions, complete with real-time tracking of donations and disbursements, could make it easier for donors to engage with the fund. Integrating QR codes and social media campaigns could help reach younger, tech-savvy donors, while partnerships with influential figures or organizations could amplify the fund's message.

The MPDF has the potential to play a vital role in strengthening South Africa's democracy, but the challenges highlighted need to be addressed to be able to unlock its full potential. By introducing financial incentives, improving transparency and reframing donor messaging, adjusting the allocation formula, and engaging key stakeholders, the IEC and other stakeholders can transform the MPDF into one of the cornerstones of democratic sustainability. As President Ramaphosa's 2024 legislative reforms demonstrate, there is the political will to support multiparty democracy—now, clear action is required to ensure that the MPDF fulfils its promise of a building a vibrant, equitable democratic landscape (The Presidency, 2024).

3. Methodology

A mixed-method approach that encapsulates elements of both quantitative and qualitative elements (e.g., data collection, analysis, and inference techniques) was used for this study (Johnson et al. 2007). To further enhance results obtained by using the various methods, triangulation was applied, in which secondary data (literature review) will be cross-referenced with primary data (representative citizen survey and KIIs).

The technical approach included a review of relevant literature, sampling, design of data collection instruments, research ethics application, collection of data, data cleaning and weighting, and analysis and report-writing. Survey data was collected by means of face-to-face, interviewing using random probability sampling methods. Key informant interviews (KIIs) with thematic experts representing different types of sectors and stakeholder were also undertaken through a mix of in-person or through a web-based video-conferencing platform. More details on the study approach are provided below.

3.1. Survey research methodology

Data from the 2024 round of the South African Social Attitudes Survey ([SASAS](#)) were used for this report. The nationally representative SASAS series has been conducted on an annual basis by the HSRC since 2003. This section presents information on the details of the survey, including questionnaire design and sampling framework. The first subsection explains the sample design of the survey, the second describes the data collection protocols, the third explains fieldwork preparation, and the fourth subsection outlines the data capturing and weighting processes.

3.1.1. *The sample design*

In accordance with the SASAS research infrastructure's standard approach, the survey was designed to yield a representative sample of 3,500 adults aged 16 years and older living in South Africa. The sample was spread across the country's nine provinces and was restricted to adults living in private residences. SASAS has three sampling stages. Small area layers (SALs) were the primary sampling units and in the first stage, five hundred SALs were drawn. Estimates of the population numbers for various categories of the census variables were obtained per SAL. Data for this stage were drawn from the 2011 census and updated using mid-year population estimates. Three explicit stratification variables were used to draw the SALs, namely province, geographic type, and majority population group. When drawing the sample, special institutions (such as hospitals, military camps, old age homes, schools and university hostels), recreational areas, industrial areas and vacant SALs were excluded.

Dwelling units (also known as visiting points) in each SAL were taken as the secondary sampling unit (SSU). A dwelling unit is defined as a "separate (non-vacant) residential stand, address,

structure, flat, homestead, etc.” In the second stage, seven SSUs were selected per SAL. SSUs were drawn with equal probability in each of the selected SALs. SSUs were selected using a random starting point and counting an even interval between households. The interval was calculated using the total number of households in the SAL. Finally, in the third sampling stage, a person was drawn with equal probability from all persons 16 years and older living at each selected visiting point (SSU). This person (i.e., the respondent) needed to be 16 years or older and have resided at the visiting point for at least 15 out of the past 30 days. The fieldwork period started in February 2025 and ended in March of 2025.

3.1.2. Data collection protocol

The HSRC subscribes to a strict internal Code of Ethics. The study design and research tools were submitted for approval by the HSRC’s Research Ethics Committee (REC). Each interview conducted by the HSRC is fielded only if the REC has approved it. Before each interview was conducted, the following protocols were observed:

Adult respondents and Informed Consent (older than 18 years): All respondents aged 18 years and older were asked for informed consent. A digital consent form explained the purpose of the study; emphasising that participation is voluntary and explained the likely duration of the interview. The form made clear how confidentiality will be preserved; and offers an earnest appraisal of the risks/discomforts and benefits associated with participation in the study. Respondents were provided with details of the HSRC’s toll-free ethics hotline and survey coordinator contacts.

Minors and Written Informed Consent (Persons under the age of 18 years): In instances where the selected research participant was a minor aged 16-17 years, the informed consent process adhered to the HSRC’s Guidelines on research with orphans and vulnerable children. A dual consent process was required, both from the minors and their parent/guardian.

Ensuring confidentiality of information: All personal information on the respondent was removed when the data is captured and analysed. Codes to identify respondents were used instead. Personal information is stored electronically with password-protection at the HSRC. The SASAS team is compliant with all relevant legislation that protects the data of respondents.

3.1.3. Fieldwork Procedures and Training

The following general protocol guidelines for data gathering were implemented:

- Fieldworkers and supervisors were required to notify the relevant local authorities that they would be working in the specific area. The purpose was twofold: (a) to increase safety protocols for fieldworkers; and (b) to reassure respondents that the survey was certified. Official letters describing the project and its duration and relevant ethical issues

were distributed to the authorities. This was done not only as a form of research and ethical protocol but also to ensure the safety of the fieldwork teams.

- Supervisors were advised to inform the *Inkosi* or *Induna* in a traditional authority area, whilst in urban formal or urban informal areas they had to report to the local police station. In some areas, the local councillor was also met and informed of the study prior to commencing fieldwork.
- When approaching a farm, fieldworkers were advised to enter with caution and that they should report to the local Agri South Africa (Agri SA) offices before doing so. Fieldwork supervisors were issued with specialised letters for farmers which contained information on the purpose of the study and contact details in case they received queries.
- Consent forms needed to be completed prior to initiating each interview. Informed consent was built into the online questionnaire on the hand-held devices, with respondents being asked to sign approval before proceeding with the interview. In instances where the respondent did not wish to sign, verbal consent was secured from the respondent.
- Fieldworkers were issued with name tags and letters of introduction to be used in the field. The introduction letter was translated from English into eight other official languages.
- Fieldworkers had to present their identity cards when introducing themselves.

A network of locally based fieldwork supervisors in all parts of the country assisted in data collection. Competent fieldworkers with a thorough understanding of the local areas were employed as part of this project. Two-day training sessions were held in each of the provinces. The training session included lessons on selection and sampling of households; fieldwork operating procedures; research protocols and ethical considerations. The content of the questionnaires was dealt with in-depth in English and in translation, and the use of the forms on the tablets was a further area of focus. As far as possible, the training was designed to be participatory, practical and interactive, and gave fieldworkers the opportunity to seek clarification. A training manual was also developed as part of the training toolkit. All relevant remarks and instructions discussed during the training session were included in the training manual.

Figure 1: An Example of a Small Area Layer Map used to Assist the Fieldwork Teams to Navigate to the Correct Areas



Once the training sessions were completed, a navigational toolkit was provided to fieldwork teams. These toolkits were developed to assist the field teams in finding the selected SALs. The kits assisted the supervisors and fieldworkers to locate the exact SAL where the interviews were to take place. The navigational kits included:

- Route descriptions, to assist the teams to navigate their way into the selected areas.
- Maps that, using aerial photographs as a base, identified the exact geographic location of the area to be sampled.
- More detailed maps that identified the exact area, pinpointing street names and places of interest such as schools, clinics, hospitals, etc. These maps also included latitude-longitude, GPS coordinates indicating the centroid of the SAL. An example of a map is depicted in Error! Reference source not found..

HSRC researchers conducted random visits to selected areas and worked with the fieldworkers for a certain period to ensure that they adhered to ethical research practices and that they understood the intent of the questions in the questionnaire. HSRC researchers also ensured that the correct selection protocols were followed to identify SSUs and respondents in the household. The researchers also checked on the procedures followed in administering the research instrument. Field backchecks were also conducted in all nine provinces. Telephonic backchecks were done on at least 10% of the total sample.

3.1.4. Data Capturing and Weighting

In each SASAS round, an external service provider conducted data-capturing. The final dataset was converted into Stata and SPSS and a data manager embarked on a data-cleaning exercise. Data was checked and edited for logical consistency, permitted ranges, reliability on derived variables and filter instructions. After data cleaning, the analytical team received the realisation rates of the survey. SASAS normally has a high interview realisation rate. SASAS 2024 was no different, with a realisation rate of 83% (or 2,912 out of 3,500) achieved in this round (Table 1). Our high realisation rate is partly achieved due to the fact that communities were well-informed about the survey.

Table 1: Sample Realisation for South African Social Attitudes Survey, 2024

Province	Number of SALs	Ideal Sample (N)	Realised Sample (N)	Realisation Rate (%)
Western Cape	65	455	280	62%
Eastern Cape	65	455	431	95%
Northern Cape	37	259	228	88%
Free State	38	266	206	77%
KwaZulu-Natal	93	651	618	95%
North West	37	259	224	86%
Gauteng	83	581	421	72%
Mpumalanga	38	266	265	99%
Limpopo	44	308	239	78%
Total	500	3500	2912	83%

To incorporate respondents' socio-demographic attributes, several commonly used demographic dummy variables were generated for this study. Standard variables accounted for gender, province of residence, and racial classification.⁴ Using the age variable, generational cohorts were constructed. The following four cohorts were constructed: Generation Z (i.e., the 1997-2009 birth cohort), the Millennial Generation (i.e., the 1981-1996 birth cohort), Generation X (i.e., the 1965-1980 birth cohort) and the Post-War Generation (i.e., the 1946-1964 birth cohort). Additionally, social status was measured through educational attainment (based on the number of years of formal schooling completed) and employment status. Socio-economic status was assessed using a composite index derived from responses to 25 questions on asset ownership, covering items such as cars and microwaves, as well as access to essential services

⁴ Racial categories are based on respondents' self-identification; this study does not support the notion of race as a biological concept.

like electricity, flush toilets, and piped water.⁵ The index ranged from 0 to 10, with lower scores representing a lower socio-economic standing.

3.2. Qualitative research methodology

3.2.1. Key informant interviews

At the outset of the project, the following stakeholder groups were identified as key thematic expert participants: IEC officials with in-depth knowledge of political funding, political analysts from academia, media representatives, political party representatives, donors, gender experts, and civil society stakeholders. A total of 46 individuals were approached, 26 of whom agreed to participate in interviews. Of the remaining 20, 18 did not respond to phone calls or correspondence, while 2 declined the invitation to be interviewed.

Key informant interviews were conducted using a structured questionnaire, which was developed using the process described below.

3.2.2 Key informant questionnaire construction

The development of the key stakeholder interview instrument was informed in part by the earlier study, *Safeguarding Democracy: Assessing Progress After the First Year of Implementing the Political Party Funding Act (PPFA)* and included input from HSRC researchers and IEC officials. **Table 2** below outlines the key thematic areas and questions of the instrument. Please note that the full interview schedule is available in Appendix 2.

Table 2: Thematic areas and key questions included in the key informant interviews

IEC effectiveness	• Overall, do you think the IEC is implementing the PFA effectively? • Overall, do you think that the IEC is implementing the PFA impartially? • Are you aware of any concerns about the manner in which the IEC has endeavoured to monitor compliance with the PFA? • Are you aware of any concerns about the manner in which the IEC has endeavoured to enforce compliance with the PFA? • Are you aware of any disagreements or conflict between any political parties or independent candidates and the IEC arising from the manner in which the IEC has endeavoured to implement the PFA?
IEC additional capacity	• What type(s) of capacity does the Electoral Commission require to be able to effectively ensure compliance with the Act by political parties and all other stakeholders?

⁵ Standardised assessments demonstrated that these items effectively merged, ensuring both validity and reliability, resulting in a cohesive scale.

PFA impact on impartiality and free & fair elections?	- Do you think that the IEC's constitutional mandate to ensure free and fair elections is in any way in conflict with its monitoring, compliance and enforcement responsibilities in terms of the PFA? - Do you think that the IEC's responsibility to implement the PFA has undermined or strengthened perceptions of its ability to remain impartial, or its actual impartiality, to ensure free and fair elections?
Another institution?	- Do you believe that the IEC is the most appropriate institution to implement this Act? Please motivate your response. - Do you think that alleged breaches of the provisions of the PFA by either donors, political parties or independent candidates should be investigated by an organisation other than the IEC?
Trust in the IEC, or fear of the legal consequences of non-compliance?	Why do you think political parties continued to respect these disclosure and reporting 'obligations'?
Threshold and cap.	Are the current thresholds for disclosure of private donations to political parties (R100 000) and annual caps on donations from a single source (R15 million) appropriate or should they be changed, i.e. increased or decrease?
Should regulation focus on income and/or expenditure?	Which approach better serves the purpose of funding transparency and accountability, which are the primary objectives of South Africa's political funding legislation?
Public vs private funding	On balance, do the benefits of private funding (such as strengthening political competition) outweigh the risks associated with private funding (such as undue influence) of political role-players?
Gender	- Do you think gender considerations affect how political parties distribute their funding? - Do political parties treat male and female electoral candidates differently when allocating funds? - Do private or corporate donations negatively influence the number of women on political parties' candidates lists? - How important is gender-sensitive budgeting[1] in political campaigns? - What can be done to encourage political parties to invest more in women-led initiatives and gender-equal policies at all levels? - Could political funding, possibly including public allocations and / or private donations, be used in ways that advance, encourage or promote other relevant social objectives, such as equal gender representation in parties' candidates lists?
Multi Party Democracy Fund	- What are the reasons that the MPDF is less preferred compared to direct funding of political parties and independents? - Does the MPDF have a role to play in the political funding architecture in South Africa? Is it relevant (in current circumstances)? - If yes, how could donations to this Fund be encouraged or incentivised?
Other	Other comments

3.2.3 Research training

The HSRC's fieldwork protocol requires researchers to be familiar with the project's content before commencing data collection. Additionally, a training and discussion session was held with the research team to raise awareness of the gender theme and address any questions or concerns from the field research team.

3.2.4 Research ethics

Research ethics plays a pivotal role in ensuring the integrity, credibility and responsible conduct of research activities. Upholding ethical standards is essential to safeguard the rights and well-being of research participants. Researchers need to adhere to principles such as respect for human dignity, autonomy, informed consent, care for vulnerable persons, confidentiality, minimising harm, maximum benefit, and justice.

Before the interview, all study participants were asked to sign a consent form confirming their understanding of the research purpose. Participants were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and that the findings would be analysed in a way that would not identify any individual. They were also given the option to indicate if they wished to be quoted on the record, and a few chose this option. Interviews were conducted using a structured interview guide. Participants were informed that the data collected would be securely stored on the HSRC IT platform, accessible only to the research team. The study protocol, including all instruments, was approved by the HSRC Research Ethics Committee (Protocol No. REC 3/27/11/24).

3.2.5 Data collection approach

All interviews were conducted virtually. A single fieldwork coordinator facilitated initial contact with political parties, after which each field researcher was responsible for follow-up, establishing contact, and conducting the interview. Other respondents were approached directly by field researchers using a letter of introduction from the IEC. Online interviews were recorded using the MS Teams and Zoom platforms.

The HSRC allocated eight senior researchers and one PhD intern to conduct the interviews over a period of approximately four (4) weeks. The data collection process commenced on 17 February and was concluded on 18 March 2025. Researchers were required to provide weekly updates on their fieldwork progress.

Due to a disappointingly low response rate by political parties to these efforts to secure interviews (only three parties participated in interviews), on 24 April 2025 the IEC wrote to political party representatives on the Party Liaison Committee (PLC) to 'respectfully urge' parties to 'encourage' party representatives to 'take part in this important initiative'. HSRC field

researchers also contacted designated party representatives once again, using the IEC's letter. In response to these efforts, three additional parties participated in interviews. After other requests elicited no substantive responses, the IEC and HSRC agreed to terminate this second round of data collection on 16 May 2025.

3.2.6 Data management

The HSRC developed and implemented an online data management system (Excel database) on the HSRC's secure shared drive to securely store and organise interview data, ensuring compliance with data protection and privacy regulations. To meet research ethics requirements and privacy standards, numerical codes were assigned to each respondent for the anonymous and orderly processing and storage of data. The Excel database included the following information: 1) Name of the respondent; 2) Description of the participant's portfolio/post; 3) Organisation with which the participant is affiliated; 4) Contact details (email and/or telephone); 5) Interviewer (researcher) who conducted the interview; 6) Comments on interview scheduling; 7) Notes on interview progress or challenges encountered, including whether recordings and transcripts were uploaded. This data management tool was also used to monitor the weekly progress of the fieldwork and to capture any challenges experienced during the fieldwork period.

3.2.7 Data analysis

Data collected for the study was in two formats. First, interview recordings and transcripts generated by MS Teams were recorded and uploaded. Second, each researcher was responsible for capturing key quotes from each interview in a shared Excel spreadsheet. After the interviews were conducted, these key quotes were compiled into interview summaries. The interview transcripts were analysed in conjunction with the key quotes from respondents.

A core research team was formed to analyse the data. Questions were analysed by theme, and a thematic approach was adopted for the report.

4. Results of the nationally representative public survey on political funding

The present section reports on the results from the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) module on funding for political parties and independent candidates. This includes an examination of public attitudes towards political party funding and regulatory oversight, focusing on awareness of the Political Funding Act (PFA) and the Multi-Party Democracy Fund (MPDF). The section outlines the complex factors that shape public opinion on party financing regulations. Overall, the results presented here underscore a complex interplay between political participation, awareness of regulatory frameworks, and public trust in the ability of the Electoral Commission. Understanding these attitudes is critically important because they provide insight into how well citizens comprehend and support the mechanisms that underpin transparency and accountability in political financing. In South Africa, where public trust in democratic institutions is low and confidence in the political class is weak, gauging opinions on funding regulations is very important.

There are five subsections in this section of the report that investigate different topics of relevance. Political party funding is embedded in a broader socio-political context, so the first subsection evaluates public opinion of the current political climate, donation behaviour patterns, and beliefs about the freedom to donate. These elements collectively reflect broader sentiments about democracy and governance in South Africa. Examining public backing for political funding rules is crucial as it reveals citizens' level of faith in the integrity of the democratic system. The second subsection explores public knowledge of political finance regulation as well as support for different kinds of funding regulations. This subsection also investigates concerns about elite influence and views on donor transparency. The third subsection examines public opinion on the Electoral Commission's ability to regulate political donations, including who should collect funding data, the perceived importance of such processes, and overall confidence in the Commission's ability to implement and enforce the PFA.

The fourth subsection looks at public attitudes towards the MPDF. It reveals citizens' awareness of the fund and their confidence in the Electoral Commission's management of it. In addition, the subsection explores public willingness to donate to the MPDF as well as the factors influencing this willingness (including the potential effect of tax relief). These results show us how people can be encouraged to donate to the MPDF. The final subsection assesses public attitudes toward reforming finance regulations. This is valuable because it exposes which changes are likely to be accepted by the mass public. In sum, this section of the report provides insight into popular views on enhancing transparency, accountability, and fairness in political financing. The data presented here should help policymakers with their efforts to enhance transparency, accountability, and fairness in South African elections.

4.1. Political engagement and donations

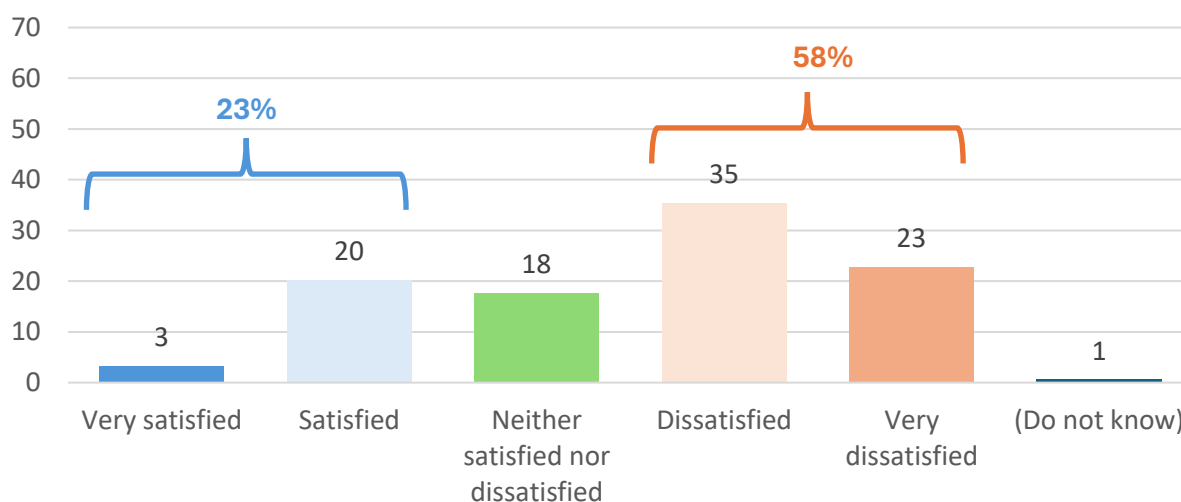
Political funding should not be viewed in isolation; rather, it is embedded in a complex national context where political factors play a critical role. When evaluating public opinion on political funding, consequently, it is essential to consider the broader political climate at the time of the survey. Understanding the prevailing political environment provides crucial context for interpreting public opinion, it reflects not only immediate reactions to funding regulations but

also broader sentiments about the state of democracy and governance. The section starts by looking at the current political mood, trying to understand how people in South Africa think about politics. Then we turn our attention to how often people have donated money to or raised funds for a political party or an independent candidate, assessing patterns in this particular kind of behaviour. In the third section, we investigate whether people believe they should have the freedom to donate to political causes, examining issues related to democratic participation and political financing.

4.1.1. Dissatisfaction with the political climate

To gauge overall perceptions of government performance, respondents in SASAS 2024 were asked whether they believed South Africa was heading in the right or wrong direction. A significant majority (79%) stated the wrong direction, indicating that they felt the country was on an erroneous path. Additionally, our survey results show that public confidence in democracy was low. Nearly three-fifths (58%) of adults expressing dissatisfaction with how democracy functioned while only 23% reported being satisfied (**Figure 2**). Empirical evidence, on the whole, seems to show a prevailing sense of dissatisfaction with the political and democratic landscape. This widespread dissatisfaction may stem from factors such as unmet expectations from the last election, economic challenges, perceived corruption, and a general sense that political institutions are failing to deliver improvements.

Figure 2: Public satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the way democracy is working in South Africa



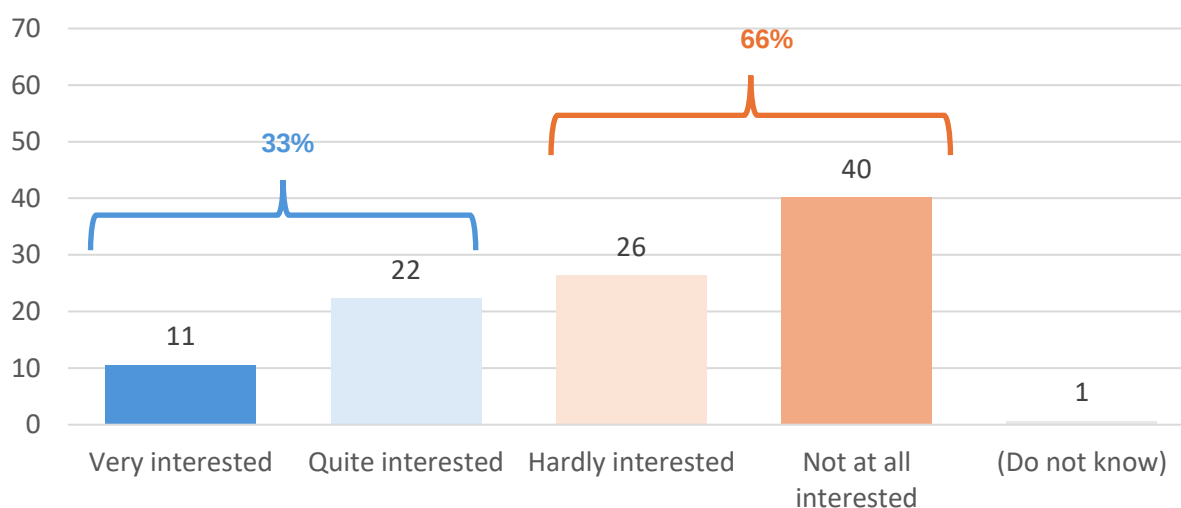
Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

The political class in South Africa does not have a very good reputation amongst the mass public. Only a small minority (17%) of the general public state that they trust political parties and a clear majority (68%) distrust these organisations. Levels of trust are even more circumscribed if we look at how people feel about politicians themselves. A mere 14% of the public expressed trust in politicians while a significant majority (70%) reported a lack of trust in this group. A substantial share of the mass public is also dissatisfied with the country's current political leaders. The survey data shows that more than three-fifths of the public is either dissatisfied (37%) or very dissatisfied (29%) with political leaders. These results suggest a deep crisis of public confidence

in the country's political class. Possible causes of this discontent are concerns about political corruption, poor government performance, as well as political fragmentation and infighting.

The majority of adults living in South Africa, as can be clearly observed in **Figure 3**, do not consider themselves politically engaged. Only a minority of the general public would describe themselves as either very (11%) or quite (22%) interested in politics. Even amongst those who were members of political parties, interest in politics was weak. Less than half (46%) of political party members were interested in politics, only 18 percentage points lower than what we see for non-members. Even if we further narrow our focus to only those that were active party members, barely half (53%) of this group described themselves as being interested in politics. It would appear that there is a general disengagement from politics amongst the public, even including those affiliated with political parties. This may be related to the widespread political disillusionment described above but also could be due to a lack of civic education and political socialisation amongst the adult population.

Figure 3: Self-reported level of interest in politics for the general public



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

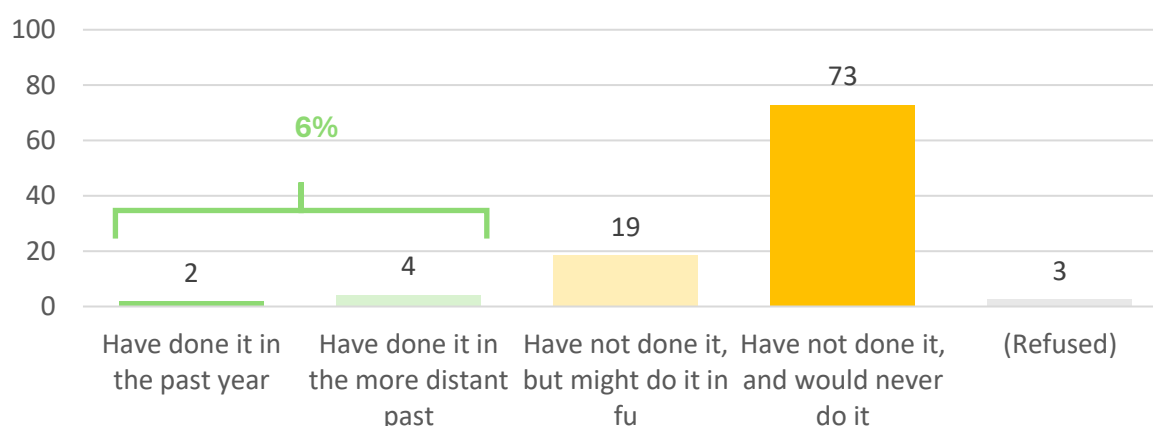
Public confidence in the Electoral Commission of South Africa was not robust. Two-fifths (41%) of the general adult population stated that they either somewhat trusted (32%) or strongly trusted (9%) the Commission. Worryingly, a large minority share reported that they either just distrusted (26%) or strongly distrusted (11%) the Commission. Despite this cynicism about the country's electoral management body, most of the voting aged public shows some eagerness to participate in elections. Just about two-thirds (66%) of age-eligible adults stated that they would *definitely* vote if there was an election tomorrow. Furthermore, a significant share of the population continues to believe that voting is a fundamental civic responsibility. We found that three-quarters of the public either agreed (50%) or strongly agreed (23%) that it is the duty of all citizens to vote. This could indicate that, despite concerns about election management and widespread disillusionment with politics, a clear majority continue to see voting as a crucial part of citizenship. It may also reflect a broader cultural norm that emphasizes participation in democratic processes, even in the face of institutional distrust.

In spite of low public confidence in South African democracy, some people in the country are optimistic about the future and look forward to what the next five years will hold. Around a third (36%) of the mass public said that things will get better for people like them in the next five years. A similar share (29%), more or less, thought that things would stay the same, while 31% expressed the belief that life would get worse. There were notable generational differences in how this question was answered. Those in Generation Z (i.e., the 1997-2009 birth cohort) and the Millennial Generation (i.e., the 1981-1996 birth cohort) were more positive about the future. Generation X (i.e., the 1965-1980 birth cohort) and the Post-War Generation (i.e., the 1946-1964 birth cohort) were, by contrast, more negative. This generational difference was not tied to a greater belief in the functioning of democracy in South Africa. Younger generations were not more satisfied with how the country's democracy was working than their older counterparts. This disparity appears to be due to the fact that younger people have a more idealistic outlook, believing in the potential for change and improvement in society.

4.1.2. Patterns of political donation behaviour

Survey participants in SASAS were queried on whether they had previously donated money to, or raised funds for, a political party or an independent candidate. As can be observed in **Figure 4** this was not seen as an activity that the majority of the general public had engaged in; less than a tenth of the public said that they participated in this activity recently (2%) or in the more distant past (4%). Amongst non-participants, political donations were not seen as something that they might do in the future. Roughly three-quarters (73%) of the mass public were non-participants who said that political donations was an activity that they would never engage in. These findings suggest that political donations are generally not an appealing or common form of political engagement for most adults in the country.

Figure 4: Public responses to the question: “Have you previously donated money to or raised funds for a political party or an independent candidate?”

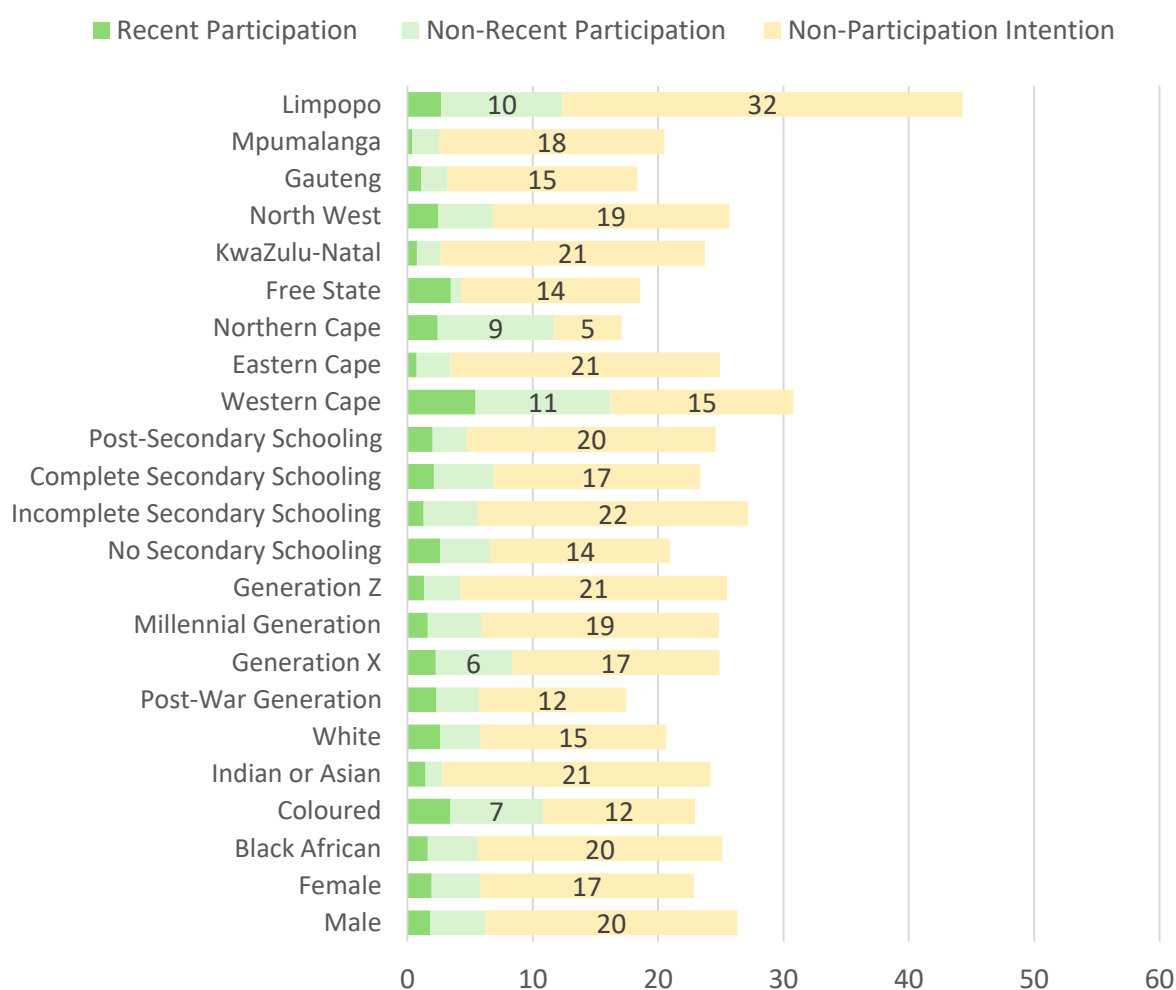


Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

The reader should be aware that there may be response bias when respondents are asked about political party donations. Many respondents may feel uncomfortable disclosing their donation behaviour due to the sensitive nature of political contributions, which can be linked to perceptions of political favouritism or undue influence. Social desirability bias may also play a role, as individuals might underreport or overreport their donation activities to align with what

they perceive to be socially acceptable. Additionally, concerns about privacy and potential repercussions —whether legal, social, or reputational —can lead respondents to be less forthcoming about their political donation behaviour. This combination of factors can result in data that do not accurately reflect true donation behaviours.

Figure 5: Percentage of different subgroups who had participated in political donations and shown an intention to participation (row percentages)



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

How people responded to the question about political donations did vary across discrete subgroups. Levels of participation in political donations across socio-demographic subgroups is displayed in **Figure 5**. As can be observed, there were significant differences among population groups. Indian adults were much more likely than others to state that they had not participated in this behaviour and would not participate in the future. We found, perhaps surprisingly, that coloured adults were more likely to have donated to political parties or independent candidates than other groups. We may have expected to find substantial age group differences in how people responded to the political donation question. Younger generations were much more likely than their older counterparts to have participated in political donations in the past. However, as can be observed from the figure, age group differences on this issue were not considerable.

There was an expectation that more educated and affluent adults would be more likely to have donated to a political party before. But this was not the case, most of those who were in the middle class are not more likely to make political donations than their poorer counterparts. However, it was possible to detect that intention to donate in the future amongst those who had never donated before was somewhat higher amongst low socio-economic status groups. We do not observe substantial gender differences in the figure. Urban status proved to be a statistically significant predictor of donation behaviour once other socio-demographic factors (e.g., educational attainment and age) were taken into account.⁶ Living in an urban resident doubled the odds of having made political donations. Interestingly, amongst those who had never donated to a political party or an independent candidate, living in an urban area did *not* increase the odds that they would express an interest in donating in the future.

We did find that electoral participation was associated with whether a person had donated to a political party or an independent candidate. Voters were found to be more likely to have donated before than those who had never voted. But the level of difference that was observed here was not substantial. Being a member of a political party was associated with having made political donations in the past. A twentieth of non-members had either donated recently (1%) or donated in the more distant past (4%). This figure was not a lot lower than what was observed for political party members. About a fifth (22%) of party members said that they had not donated before but may do so in the future, 5 percentage points higher than what was seen for non-members. When compared to inactive political party members, active members of political parties were somewhat more likely to indicate that they have not donated before but would be prepared to do so in the future. But the scale of difference –about 2 percentage points –was not that large.

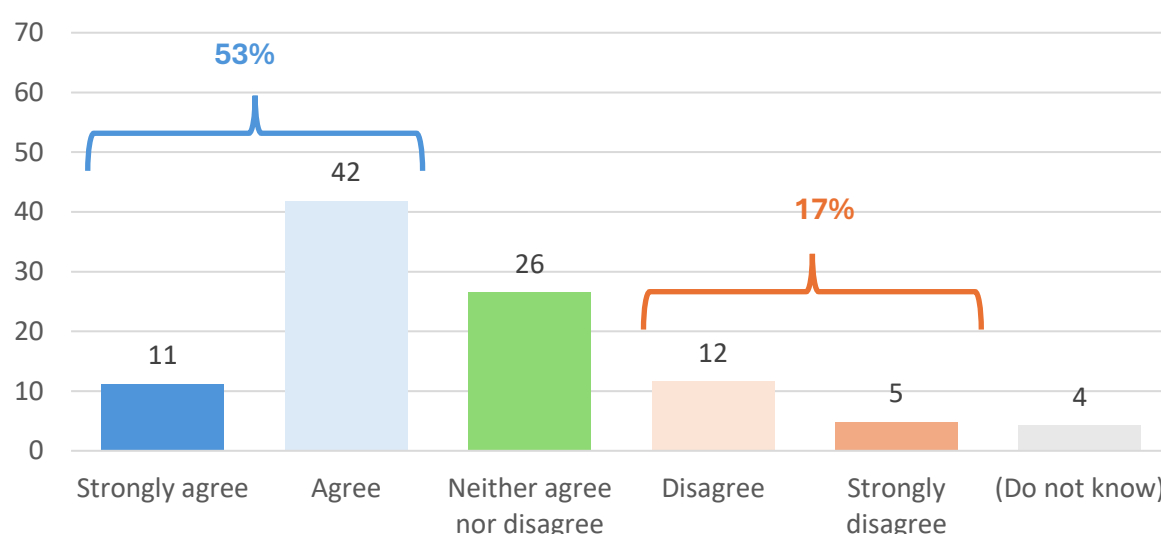
4.1.3. Support for the freedom to donate

The previous section showed that only a minority of the general public have donated money to a political party or an independent candidate. Now we look at whether people feel that they should have the freedom to donate to a political cause. Studying public opinion on this issue is valuable because it sheds light on how citizens view their role in political financing and democratic participation. In South Africa, where political engagement and transparency are key issues, understanding whether people feel empowered to contribute financially can help gauge trust in the political system and inform our thinking on how to ensure fair and accountable funding practices. This question also offers insights into broader democratic values, revealing how citizens perceive their ability to influence political processes, which is particularly important in a country with a complex political history and ongoing challenges related to economic inequality and poverty.

⁶ A multinomial logistic regression was performed to examine the factors influencing survey responses on political donation question. This allows us to include those who chose “don't know”. The analysis, which included a sample of 3,009 participants, considered age, gender, population group, education level, province, and urban status. The model produced statistically significant results (Wald $\chi^2(34) = 144$, Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.054$), suggesting that these factors collectively shaped respondents' answers.

SASAS respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed that they should have the freedom to donate money to political parties and independent candidates. Roughly half of the general public either agreed (42%) or strongly agreed (11%) with the statement while 26% of all adults remained neutral on this issue (**Figure 6**). A small minority disagreed with the statement with 12% just disagreeing and 5% strongly disagreeing. A nominal share (4%) of the adult population indicated that they did not know how to answer the question. Overall, the empirical evidence presented here infers a generally positive or neutral attitude towards the freedom to donate amongst the general public. To give the reader clearer insight into how agreement with the statement differs among various socio-demographic segments a subgroup analysis was completed, and the outcomes of that analysis are shown in **Figure 7**.

Figure 6: Public agreement and disagreement with the statement: “you should have the freedom to donate money to political parties and independent candidates?”



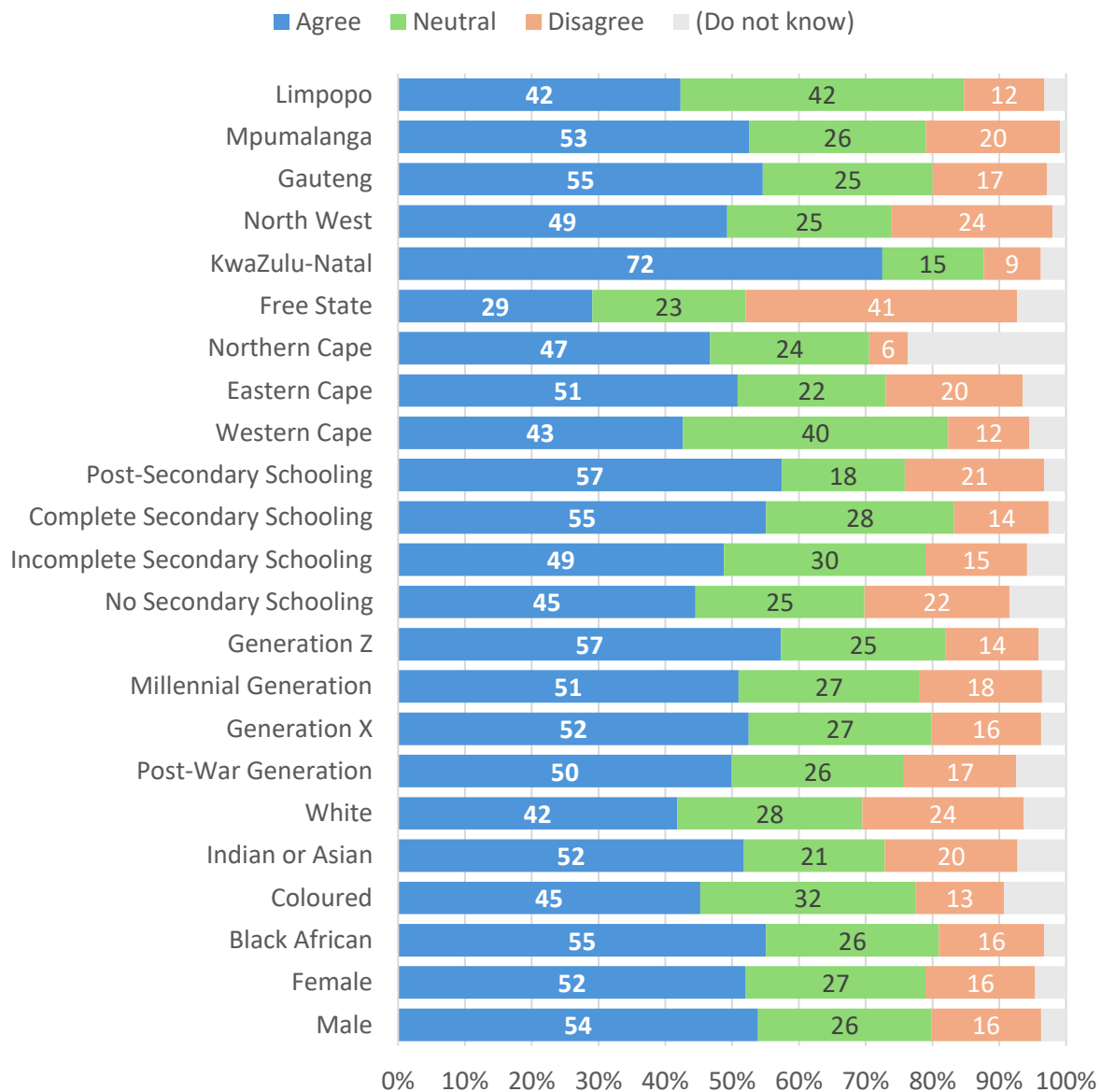
Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

There were significant differences among population groups regarding agreement with the statement that individuals should have the freedom to donate money to political parties and independent candidates. On average, white adults were more likely to disagree with the statement when compared to other groups. We found that, more or less, a quarter of white adults (14% disagreed and 10% strongly disagreed) held this view. Although the data presented in **Figure 7** shows differences by age and gender, these intergroup differences were not statistically significant once other factors were taken into account. Additionally, there were clear regional variations, with the highest levels of agreement found in KwaZulu-Natal; 72% of adults in this province agreed with the statement. This differential remained statistically significant even after controlling for various socio-demographic factors (such as educational attainment, age, and gender).⁷ Living in KwaZulu-Natal tripled the odds of agreeing with the statement.

⁷ A multinomial logistic regression analysis was conducted to examine the factors affecting survey responses, including participants who chose a non-response option. The baseline category was set as 'neutral.' The study analysed data from 3,090 respondents and accounted for variables such as age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The model produced statistically

Disagreement was found to be highest in the Free State. Multivariate analysis shows that this provincial effect continued to be statistically significant after adjusting for a range of socio-demographic variables.

Figure 7: Level of agreement and disagreement with the statement “you should have the freedom to donate money to political parties and independent candidates” across different subgroups (row percentages)



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

People who participated in elections were found to be more likely to believe that they should have the freedom to donate money to political parties and independent candidates (**Table 3**). We found that approximately three-fifths of regular voters either strongly agreed (14%) or just agreed (45%) with the statement. This is 10 percentage points higher than irregular voters and

significant findings (Wald $\chi^2(51) = 299$, Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.059$), indicating that these factors collectively influenced the participants' answers.

14 percentage points higher than those who had never voted. Even when controlling for socio-demographic characteristics using a multivariate analysis, being a regular voter increased the likelihood of agreeing with the statement by 44%.⁸ The analysis revealed that previous donation behaviour - specifically, having donated to a political party or independent candidate in the past - did not significantly influence whether individuals agreed or disagreed with the statement about having the freedom to make political donations. This finding indicates that the experience of donating does not necessarily predispose individuals to either support or oppose this type of freedom.

Table 3: Level of agreement and disagreement with the statement “you should have the freedom to donate money to political parties and independent candidates” by election participation (column percentages)

	Regular Voters		Irregular Voters		Never Voted	
Strongly agree	14%	(1.428)	11%	(1.039)	3%	(1.039)
Agree	45%	(2.148)	37%	(2.949)	41%	(4.451)
Neither agree nor disagree	24%	(1.702)	27%	(2.396)	33%	(4.350)
Disagree	11%	(1.102)	13%	(3.132)	11%	(2.332)
Strongly disagree	3%	(0.512)	7%	(1.235)	7%	(1.829)
(Do not know)	4%	(0.615)	4%	(0.764)	5%	(1.287)
Total	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

4.2. Public backing for political donations rules

Examining public backing for political funding rules is important because it reveals citizens’ trust in the political system and their views on fairness and transparency in campaign financing. This insight helps policymakers gauge whether current regulations align with public expectations and identify areas needing reform to prevent undue influence and corruption. First, we looked at public knowledge of the Political Funding Act (PFA) and how it may differ by socio-demographic subgroups. Following this, we examine popular support for laws like the PFA. In the third section, we investigate how concerned people were about wealthy donors influencing political decisions and actions. Next, we looked at whether mass public thought that the public has sufficient information about donations to political parties and candidates. Fifth, we investigated whether adults believed that the R15-million annual donation limit outlined in the PFA was too low or too high. Finally, the section considered public opinion on whether the R100,000 donation reporting threshold was too low or too high.

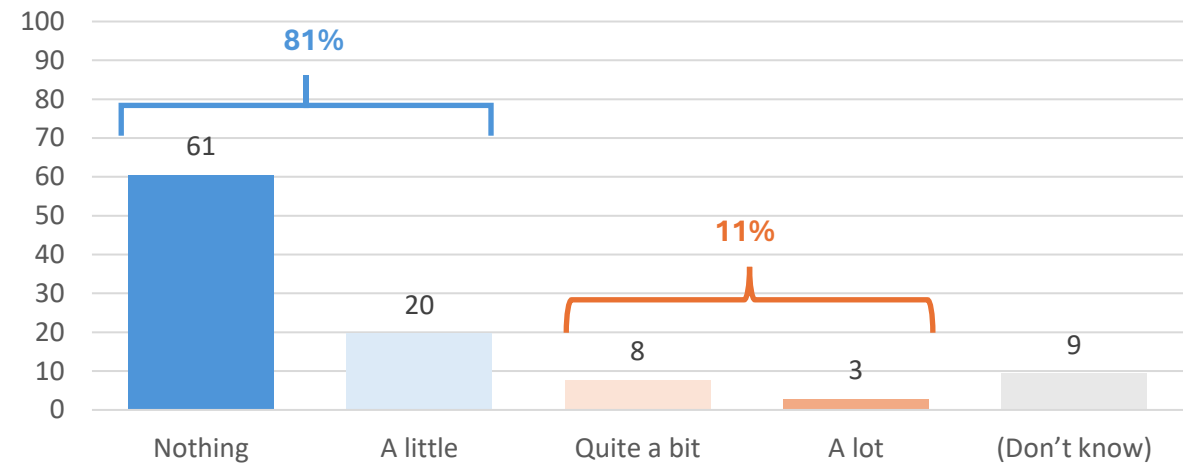
4.2.1. Awareness of South Africa’s Political Funding Act

Understanding how aware the public is of the PFA is crucial because it serves as an indicator of how well citizens grasp the fundamental rules that govern political donations and ensure

⁸ An ordered logistic regression analysis was performed to explore the factors influencing survey responses, excluding those who chose “don’t know.” Based on a sample of 2,904 participants, the analysis accounted for variables such as age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The model produced statistically significant results (Wald $\chi^2(19) = 111$, Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.036$), indicating that these factors collectively contributed to shaping respondents’ answers.

accountability. When awareness is high, it implies that people are informed about the regulatory framework surrounding political financing, which can promote greater transparency and bolster trust in the political system. Informed citizens are better equipped to hold political actors accountable, ensuring that campaign contributions are managed in a fair and open manner. The main findings of this section reveal that overall public awareness of the PFA is quite low. The scale and reasons behind this lack of public awareness will be discussed in detail in this subsection.

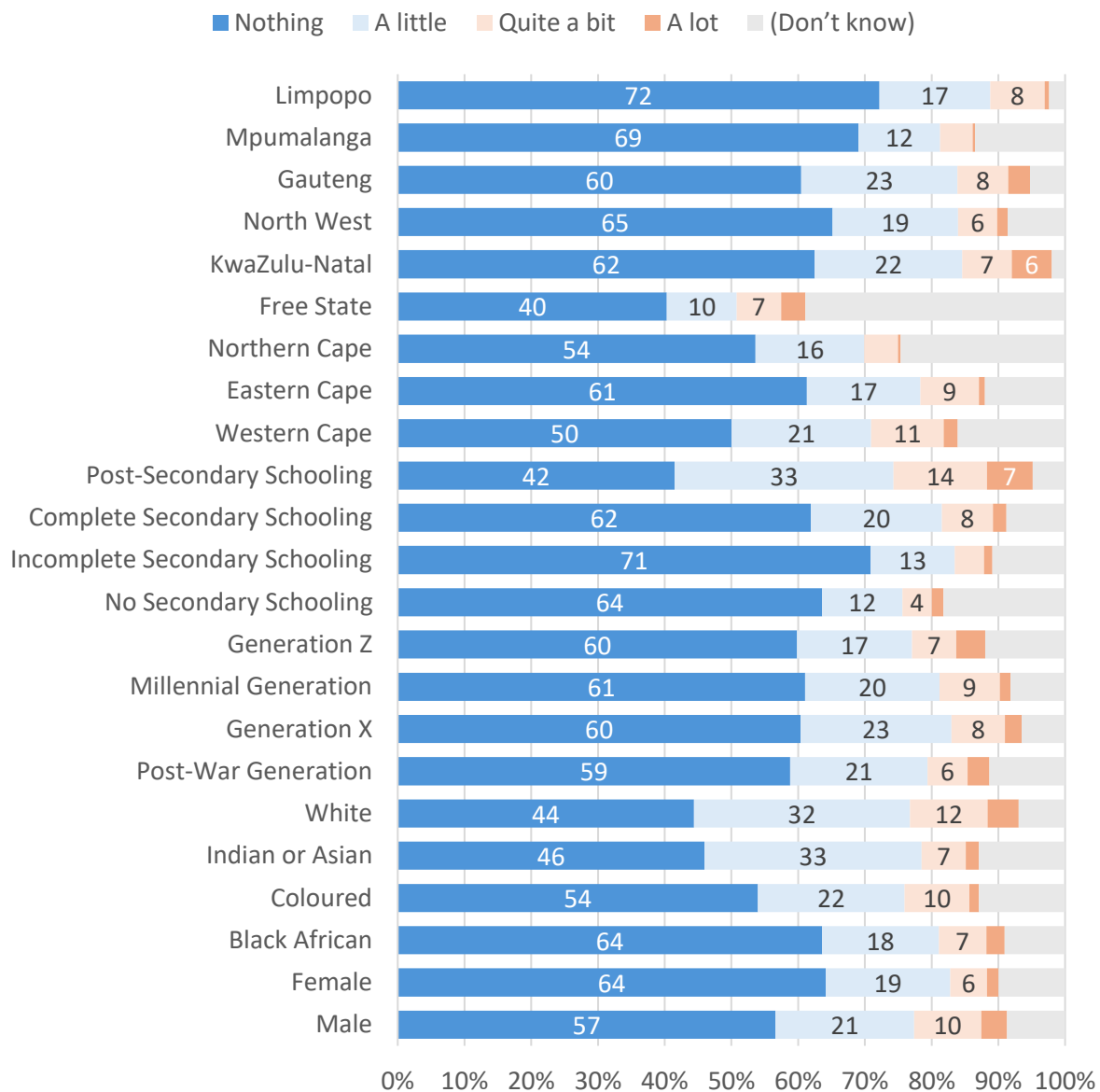
Figure 8: Public responses to the question: “How much have you heard or read about the Political Funding Act?”



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

In SASAS 2024 a question was included in the survey about knowledge of the PFA. Respondents were asked to indicate how much have you heard or read about the PFA; the results can be seen in **Figure 8**. Roughly speaking three-fifths (61%) of the general public stated they had never heard of the PFA. Only about a fifth said that they had heard or read a little about it while 8% reported that they had heard or read quite a bit about it. A small minority (3%) of the general population indicated that they had heard or read a lot about the law. A tenth of the public seem to have so little information about the PFA that they did not even know how to answer the question. Taken as a whole, these findings imply that the vast majority of the mass public is largely uninformed about the PFA; this points to a significant gap in political literacy and engagement on this issue. To help the reader better comprehend how awareness of the PFA may differ by selected socio-demographic groups, a subgroup analysis was performed, and the results are shown in **Figure 9**.

Figure 9: Level of awareness of the Political Funding Act by select socio-demographic attributes (row percentages)



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

As anticipated, there were notable differences in awareness of the PFA based on educational attainment. Those with better levels of education were found to be more aware of the law than those who were less educated. Consider, for example, that only about a twentieth of those with no secondary school had heard or read quite a bit (4%) or a lot (2%) about the PFA. This can be unfavourably compared to those with post-secondary qualifications; just about a fifth of this group heard or read quite a bit (14%) or a lot (7%) about the law (**Figure 9**). Educational attainment remained a statistically significant predictor of awareness even if we take a range of

other socio-demographic factors (e.g., gender, age and population group) into account.⁹ A similar trajectory could be observed if we look at how the level of awareness differed by socio-economic status. Those in the high or upper middle status groups were more aware of the PFA than their less affluent peers.

Women were found to be less aware of the PFA than their male counterparts. Approximately three-fifths (64%) of female adults stated that they knew nothing about the law; 7 percentage points higher than their male peers. This gender bias in favour of males continued to be a statistically significant predictor of awareness even when controlling for various socio-economic factors such as education level. After accounting for other factors through multivariate analysis, males were found to have a 31% higher probability of being aware of the law. Even though age and population group differences could be observed in **Figure 9**, these proved to be statistically insignificant once you took other socio-demographic factors into account. In addition, levels of awareness were identified as especially low in Mpumalanga and the Limpopo. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of Limpopo adults said that they had heard or read nothing about the PFA while 69% of Mpumalanga adults gave the same answer.

Persons who had donated to political parties and independent candidates in the past were discovered to be more aware of the PFA than those who had not. Around a sixth of those who had donated before said that they knew either quite a bit (14%) or a lot (2%) about the law. This is twice what was observed for those who had not donated before. Even after controlling for socio-demographic factors, having previously donated increased the likelihood of being aware of the PFA by 65%.¹⁰ If a person had never donated before but was interested in doing so in the future, then they were more aware of the law than those who had never donated and had no interest in doing so. Being a non-participant with the intention of donating in the future increased the likelihood that a person would be aware of the PFA by 52%

Table 4 presents the level of awareness of the PFA by political party affiliation. As can be observed in the table, people who were members of a political party were more likely to be aware of the PFA than non-members. Persons who were active members were more aware of the law than their non-active counterparts, but the level of difference was quite small. Further testing showed that adults who were supporters of a political party but were not members of that party were not more aware of the PFA than those who were not supporters of any political party. Taken as a whole, these findings denote that political participation and engagement (whether through donating, planning to donate, or being a party member) are significant predictors of how much individuals know about the PFA.

⁹ A statistical analysis using ordered logistic regression was performed to explore the factors influencing awareness, excluding “don't know” answers. The model accounted for age, gender, race, education level, province, and urban status, using a sample of 2,769 individuals. The model results were statistically significant (Wald $\chi^2(18) = 1103$, $\text{Prob} > \chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.056$), indicating that the combined predictors significantly explain variance in awareness.

¹⁰ An ordered logistic regression analysis examined factors influencing responses to a survey question, excluding “don't know” answers. The analysis, which included 2,769 participants, considered age, gender, race, education, province, and geotype. The model was statistically significant (Wald $\chi^2(18) = 109$, $\text{Prob} > \chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.057$), suggesting that the included variables collectively predicted the responses.

Table 4: Responses to the question: “How much have you heard or read about the Political Funding Act?” by political party affiliation (column percentages)

	Active Members		Inactive Members		Non-Member, Supporter		Non-Member, Non-Supporter	
Nothing	57%	(4.383)	51%	(3.515)	65%	(2.298)	65%	(2.857)
A little	21%	(3.503)	28%	(3.082)	18%	(1.917)	16%	(2.147)
Quite a bit	7%	(1.447)	12%	(3.118)	6%	(1.036)	8%	(1.481)
A lot	7%	(2.443)	2%	(0.820)	2%	(0.797)	1%	(0.389)
(Don't know)	8%	(1.489)	6%	(1.339)	9%	(1.161)	11%	(1.675)
Total	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...

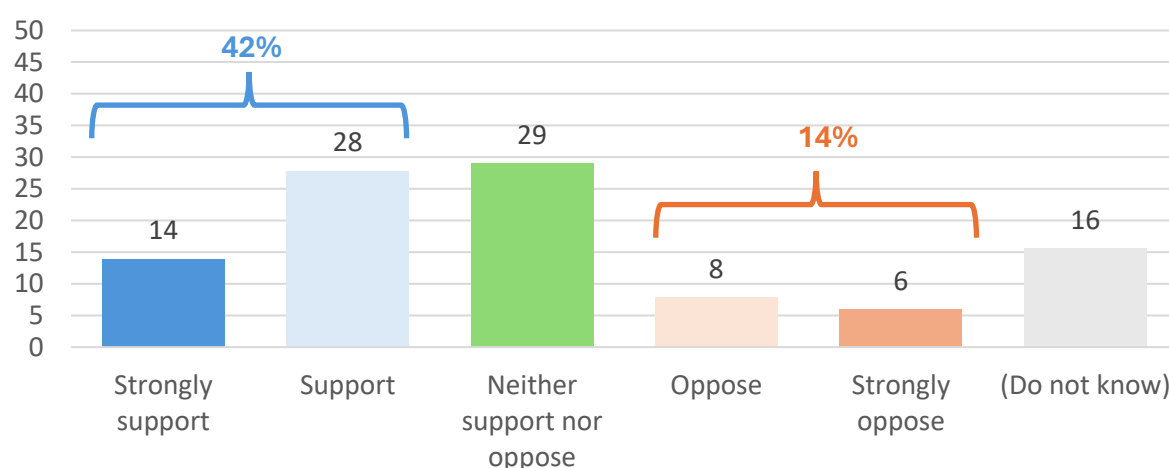
Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

4.2.2. Support for political financing regulations

The previous section revealed that public awareness of the PFA is very low. Now we change track and look at public support for a law like the PFA. Support for political financing is crucial because it provides insights into how well citizens understand and endorse the mechanisms governing political financing. This information can reveal the level of public trust in political financial regulation and help policymakers gauge the law’s legitimacy and effectiveness. Additionally, public support or opposition can signal broader concerns about corruption, fairness, and democratic accountability. Addressing these concerns are essential for maintaining an informed and engaged electorate in a functioning democracy. Survey participants were asked to indicate whether they support or oppose laws like the PFA, responses to this question are showcased in **Figure 10**.

Figure 10: Public responses to the question: “To what extent do you support or oppose laws like the Political Funding Act that require all political parties and independent candidates to say where their funding comes from?”

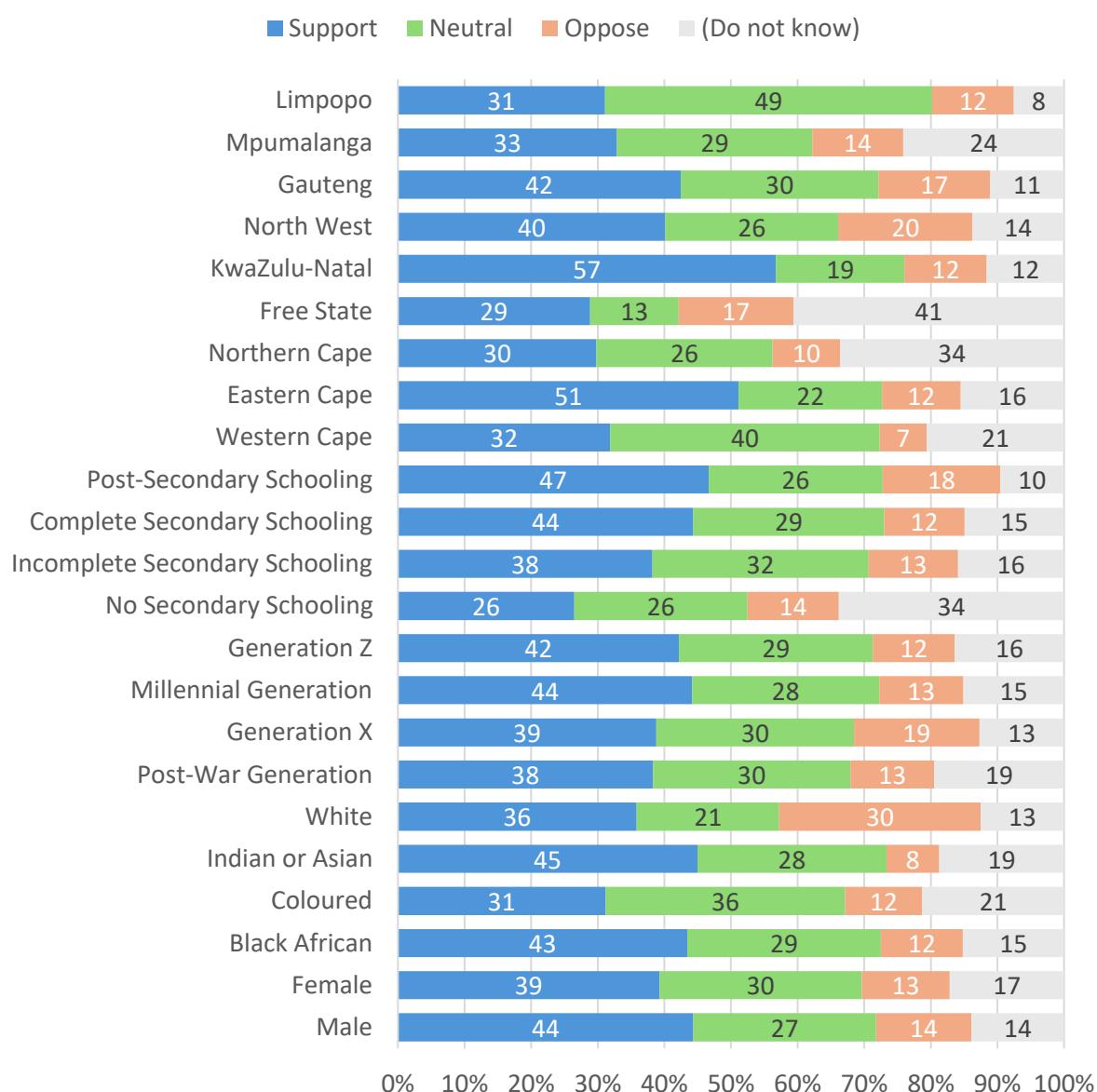


Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

Public support for laws like the PFA was not found to be especially strong amongst the mass public. Only a minority of the adult population said that they either strongly supported (14%) or just supported (28%) financial regulations like the PFA (**Figure 10**). But then again, only a fraction of the public stated that they either opposed (8%) or strongly opposed (6%) laws like the PFA. A

significant proportion of the adult public was neutral when it came to supporting financial regulations (29%) or did not know how to answer the question (16%). On the whole, the survey results reveal that public backing for laws similar to the PFA is relatively muted and mixed. Awareness of the PFA was found to be linked with taking a neutral position on support for laws like the PFA. We found that a clear majority (70%) of those who were neutral on whether they supported this kind of legislation said that they knew nothing about the PFA. Further analysis showed that people who were aware of the law also tended to support laws like it. But the strength of this correlation was not substantial.

Figure 11: Level of support and opposition for laws like the Political Funding Act by select socio-demographic attributes (row percentages)



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

To provide the reader with a better understanding of how support for laws like the PFA varies across different socio-demographic groups, a subgroup analysis was computed and the findings

from that computation were displayed in **Figure 11**. There were notable population group differences in how laws like the PFA were viewed. Adult members of the white population group were found to be, on average, more opposed to the regulation of political donations than other population groups. Consider that nearly a third of white adults said that they either opposed (18%) or strongly opposed (12%) laws like the PFA. This white bias remained statistically significant even if we take a range of other socio-demographic factors (e.g., educational attainment, age or province of residence) into account¹¹. Although the figure shows differences based on age and gender, these differences were not statistically significant after controlling for other socio-demographic factors. There were marked variations in the level of support for laws like the PFA by province of residence. Support was found to be strongest in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal while opposition was discovered to be the most robust in the North West.

There were, as may be expected, significant difference in support for laws like the PFA by educational attainment group. Those with better levels of education were found to be more supportive of the regulation of political donations. Roughly half of those with post-secondary qualifications either supported (29%) or strongly supported (18%) regulations of political financing. Even after controlling for various other socio-demographic factors (such as gender, age, and population group), educational attainment continued to be a statistically significant predictor of support. One of the reasons that educational attainment may be a robust predictor of attitudes here is that it is tied to awareness. But even if we controlled for awareness of the PFA, being educated was still found to be a positive predictor of support. Using a multivariate regression analysis to take both awareness and socio-demographic characteristics into account, holding a post-secondary qualification raised the likelihood of supporting the regulations of political financing by 54%¹². This outcome seems to confirm that exposure to formal schooling itself, beyond merely increasing awareness, shapes attitudes toward political financing regulations.

Table 5 displays the level of support and opposition for laws that regulate political party finances by past political donation behaviour. People who had previously donated to political parties and independent candidates were not found to be more or less supportive of the regulations of political financing than those who had not done so. Amongst non-participants, interestingly enough, intention to donate in the future was found to be correlated with support for laws like the PFA. The percentage of non-participants with an intention to donate who favoured the regulation of political donations was 58%, higher than what was seen for non-participants with no intention (39%) or past participants (40%). Given what we observed in the previous section,

¹¹ An ordered logistic regression analysis was performed to examine the factors influencing survey responses, excluding those who selected "don't know." The study, using a sample of 2,549 respondents, incorporated variables such as age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The model generated statistically significant results (Wald $\chi^2(17) = 62$, Prob> $\chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.021$), suggesting that these factors collectively shaped participants' responses.

¹² An ordered logistic regression was conducted to assess the factors shaping survey responses, excluding those who answered "don't know." The analysis, based on a sample of 2,549 participants, accounted for age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The model yielded statistically significant results (Wald $\chi^2(21) = 75$, Prob> $\chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.023$), indicating that these variables collectively influenced respondents' answers.

it is surprising to find that political engagement did not have a stronger effect on whether a person supported financial political regulations or not.

Table 5: Level of support and opposition for laws like the Political Funding Act by past political donation behaviour (column percentages)

	Past Participation		Non-Participant (Intention)		Non-Participant (No Intention)	
Strongly support	17%	(4.010)	20%	(3.721)	12%	(1.146)
Support	23%	(3.939)	38%	(3.956)	27%	(1.520)
Neutral	42%	(5.418)	25%	(3.269)	29%	(1.630)
Oppose	8%	(2.435)	7%	(1.626)	8%	(0.673)
Strongly oppose	3%	(1.505)	3%	(1.616)	7%	(0.861)
(Don't know)	6%	(1.793)	7%	(1.724)	17%	(0.968)
Total	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...

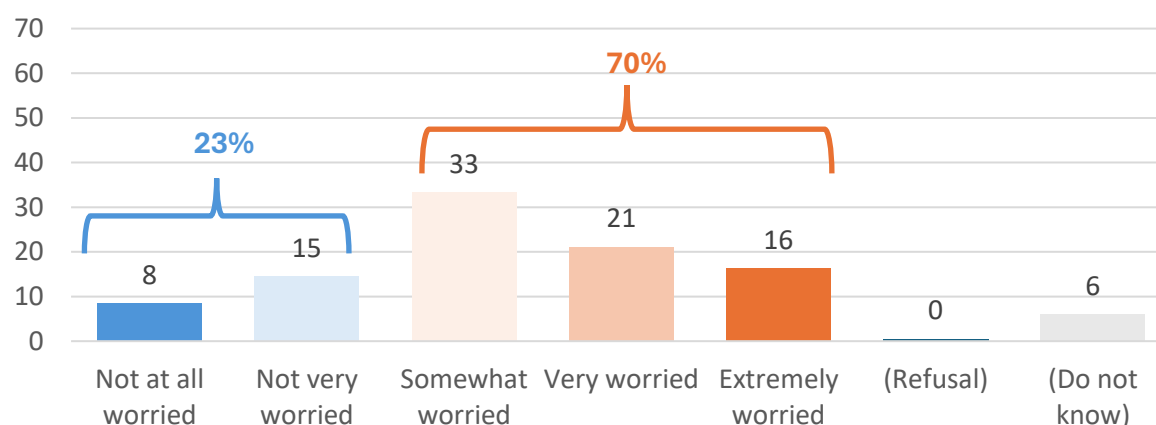
Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

4.2.3. Anxiety over elite influence in South African politics

Participants in SASAS were requested to state, overall, how worried they were that the decisions and actions of political parties and independent candidates in South Africa are being influenced by donations from the rich and powerful. The majority of the adult population expressed a concern about the way that elites manipulated the decisions of political parties with their donations. About a twelfth (16%) of the general public reported that they were extremely worried, 21% said that they were very worried and 33% told us that they were somewhat worried (**Figure 12**). Nearly a quarter of the adult public were not apprehensive, with 8% of the public stating that they were not at all worried and 15% were not very worried. A significant proportion of the mass public were uncertain of how to respond to the question (6%) or refused to answer (1%). By and large, these results indicate that apprehension about elite manipulation of political decisions is a widespread fear among the public.

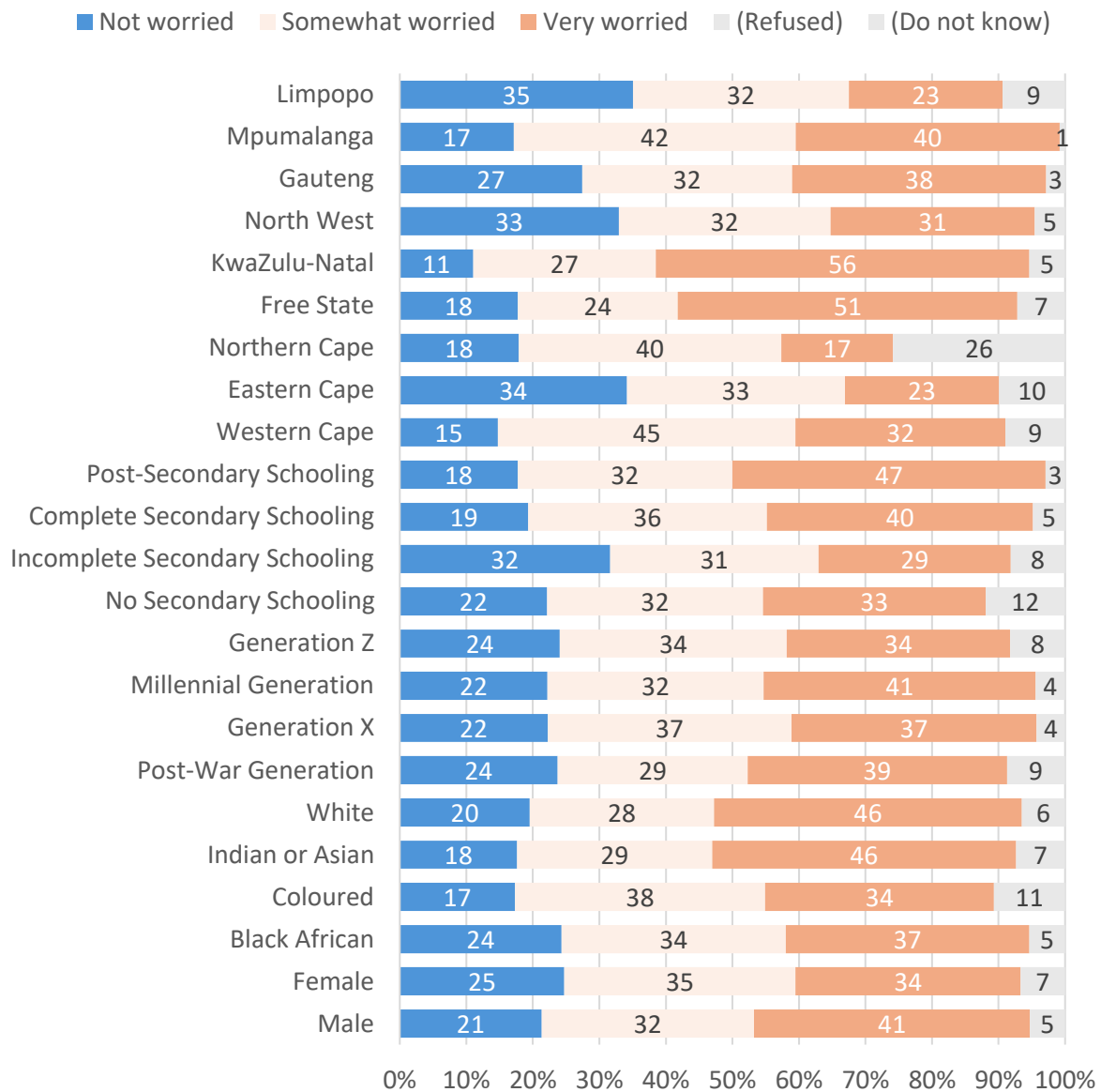
Figure 12: Public responses to the question: “Overall, how worried are you that the decisions and actions of political parties and independent candidates in South Africa are being influenced by donations from the rich and powerful?”



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

In order for us to better comprehend how public attitudes on this issue varied across South African society, we looked at level of worry about elite manipulations via donations by socio-demographic subgroup in **Figure 13**. It was apparent that better educated persons were more worried about this issue than their less educated peers. Half, more or less, of those with a post-secondary qualification said that they were either very (28%) or extremely (18%) worried about elite manipulation. Following a similar trajectory, there were significant differences among socio-economic groups. On average, those in the higher status groups were more likely to worry than their less affluent counterparts. Almost half of the high status group, for instance, said that they were either very (31%) or extremely (15%) worried about elite manipulation. By contrast just a third of those in the lower status groups expressed the same level of worry. There was also a gender differential in the figure with male adults more likely to be worried than female adults.

Figure 13: Levels of worry about the influence of political donations from the rich and powerful across diverse subgroups (row percentages)



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

A clear age differential was not apparent in **Figure 13**, it would appear that older and younger people expressed similar levels of worry when asked about elite manipulation of political parties and independent candidates. There were clear regional variations in how people responded to the elite influence question. The highest level of worry was found to be in the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal. Residents were, by contrast, much less worried about this issue in the Eastern Cape and the Northern Cape. People who voted were found to be somewhat more worried about elite exploitation of the political system than those who had never voted. Consider that roughly two-fifths of voters were very (22%) or extremely (18%) worried about elite donations to political parties. This figure is 14 percentage points greater than what we see for non-voters.

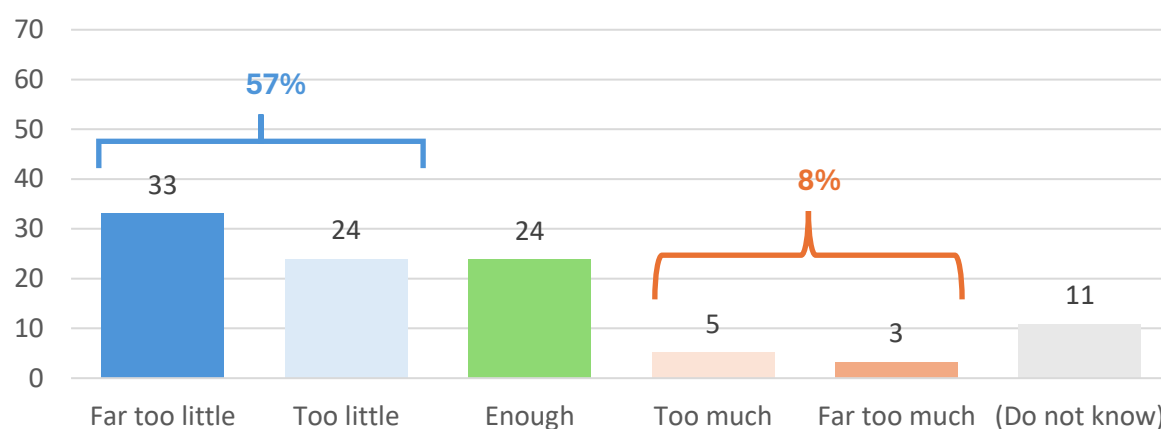
People who were worried about elites manipulating the political system were found to be more supportive of the regulations of political financing than those who were not worried. Just about half of those who supported laws like the PFA said that they were very (26%) or extremely (24%) worried that the decisions and actions of political parties and independent candidates were being unduly influenced by donations from the rich and powerful. This figure is 13 percentage points lower than what was observed for those who opposed laws like the PFA and 25 percentage points lower than those who were neutral on such laws. Even when controlling for a range of socio-demographic characteristics, being worried about elite manipulation increased the likelihood of supporting laws like the PFA.¹³ For a one unit increase on the worried scale, the likelihood of supporting legislation like the PFA increased by 27%. This outcome implies that, on the whole, concern about the undue influence of elites is a robust predictor of support for laws like the PFA.

4.2.4. Perceptions of transparency in political donations

As part of the SASAS questionnaire, survey participants were requested to tell fieldworkers if they thought that the general public has too little or too much information about who donates money to political parties and independent candidates in South Africa. Roughly half of the public said that they thought that the adult public had either too little (24%) or far too little (33%) information on this matter. Only a quarter of the public believed that people had enough information and 8% said that people had too much information. Just about a tenth (11%) of the general population were uncertain about this question and relied 'don't know'. These findings suggest that a substantial portion of the public perceives a lack of transparency regarding political donations.

¹³ An ordered logistic regression analysis was performed to examine the factors influencing survey responses, excluding participants who selected "don't know." The model, based on a sample of 2,483 individuals, incorporated age, gender, population group, education level, province, and urban status. The results were statistically significant (Wald $\chi^2(18) = 74$, $\text{Prob} > \chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.032$), suggesting that these variables collectively played a role in shaping respondents' answers.

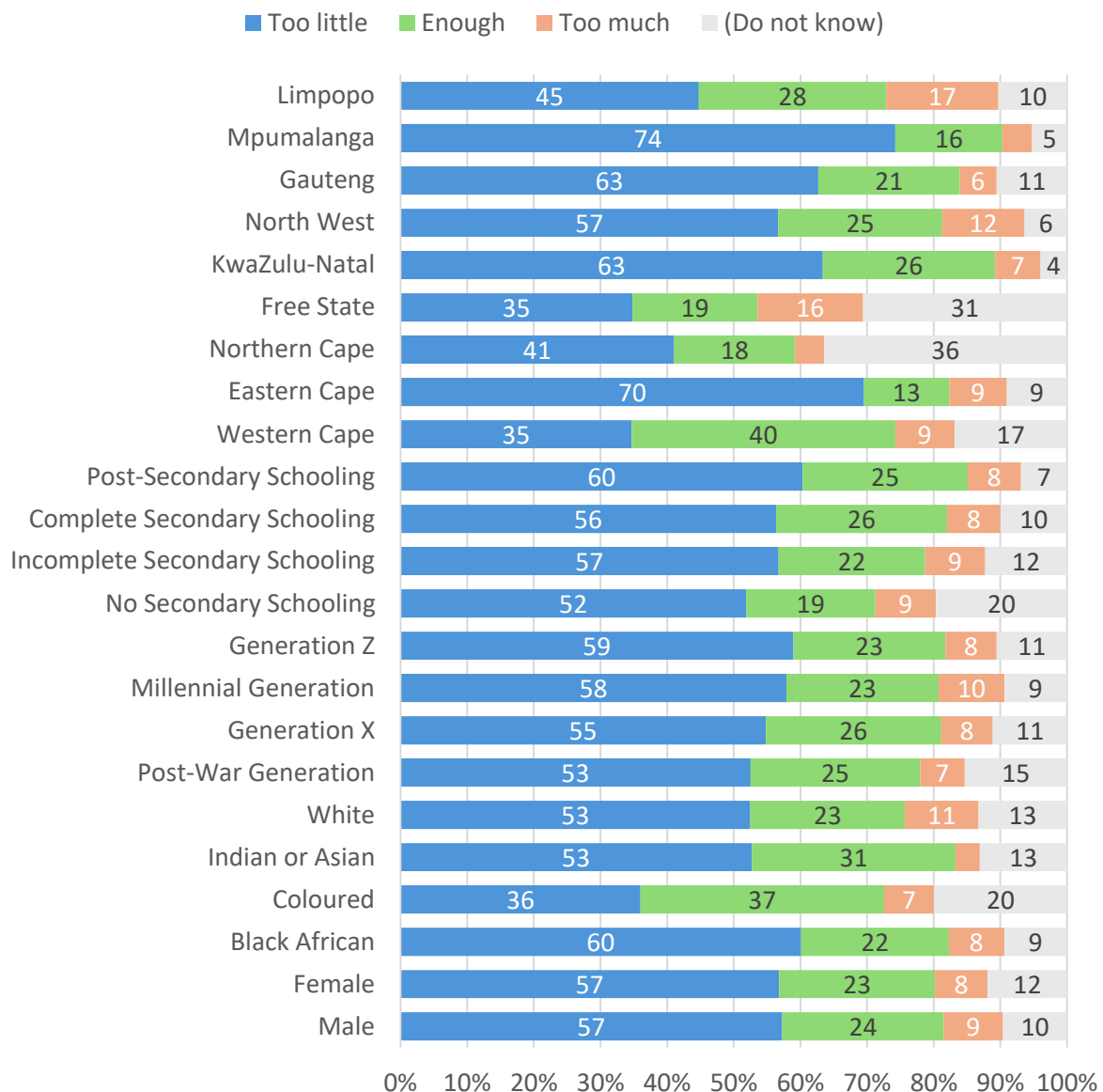
Figure 14: Public responses to the question: “Do you think the general public has too little or too much information about who donates money to political parties and independent candidates in South Africa”



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

To give the reader a clearer insight into how public perceptions of the information environment on political donations differ across various socio-demographic groups, a subgroup analysis was computed. There were, on the whole, relatively limited socio-demographic variances in how people responded to the information environment question. However, it was still possible to discern some worthwhile subgroup variations in how the public answered the question. Residents in different provinces differed significantly from each other on this issue. The provincial populations who were the most likely to state that the general public had too little information were Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape. Concern about low levels of information was, in contrast, lowest in the Western Cape and the Free State. A moderate educational attainment gradient can be observed in **Figure 15**. Those with post-secondary education were somewhat more concerned about people having too little information than their less educated peers.

Figure 15: Perception of a public who has too little or too much information about who donates money to political parties and independent candidates across dissimilar subgroups (row percentages)



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

Adults who had donated to political parties or independent candidates before were somewhat less likely than their peers to state that the general public had too little information on who donates money to political parties and independent candidates in South Africa. But the main difference between participants and non-participants on this issue was that the former were much less likely than the latter to respond 'don't know' to this question. People who were members of political parties also tended to be concerned that the adult public did not have enough information about who donates. Then again, the overall difference between members and non-members was not substantial, only 7 percentage points. Awareness of the PFA was found to be linked with whether a person thought the information environment was poor. Even when taking other factors into account, we found that if a person was aware of the law then they were much less likely to indicate the information environment was deficient. For a one unit

increase on the awareness scale, the likelihood of thinking that the environment was poor decreased by 29%.¹⁴

Table 6: Perception of a public who has too little or too much information about who donates money to political parties and independent candidates by support for laws like the Political Funding Act (PFA) (column percentages)

	Supported Laws		Neutral		Opposed Laws		Uncertain	
Far too little	44%	(2.570)	26%	(3.417)	29%	(4.270)	22%	(2.525)
Too little	28%	(2.330)	22%	(2.545)	24%	(3.021)	16%	(2.917)
Enough	19%	(1.911)	37%	(3.283)	22%	(3.017)	15%	(2.172)
Too much	5%	(0.795)	4%	(1.445)	9%	(1.766)	5%	(1.465)
Far too much	3%	(0.647)	1%	(0.486)	7%	(1.945)	5%	(1.286)
(Do not know)	3%	(0.672)	9%	(1.639)	9%	(2.060)	37%	(3.146)
Total	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

Individuals' perceptions of the donation information environment were linked to their support for the regulation of political donations. The data presented in **Table 6** showed that those who believed that the available information was lacking were more likely to back laws like the PFA. For example, around three-quarters of adults who supported laws like the PFA thought the information environment was poor. This figure is 14 percentage points above the national average and 18 percentage points higher than those who opposed laws similar to the PFA. Even after controlling for a range of socio-demographic factors, perceiving the information environment as poor significantly increased the odds of supporting laws comparable to the PFA.¹⁵ We discovered that a one-unit increase on the agree-disagree scale was associated with a 42% higher likelihood of support. This empirical evidence seems to imply that concerns about transparency in political donations play a notable role in shaping public support for the regulation of political donations.

4.2.5. Support for donation maximum limitations

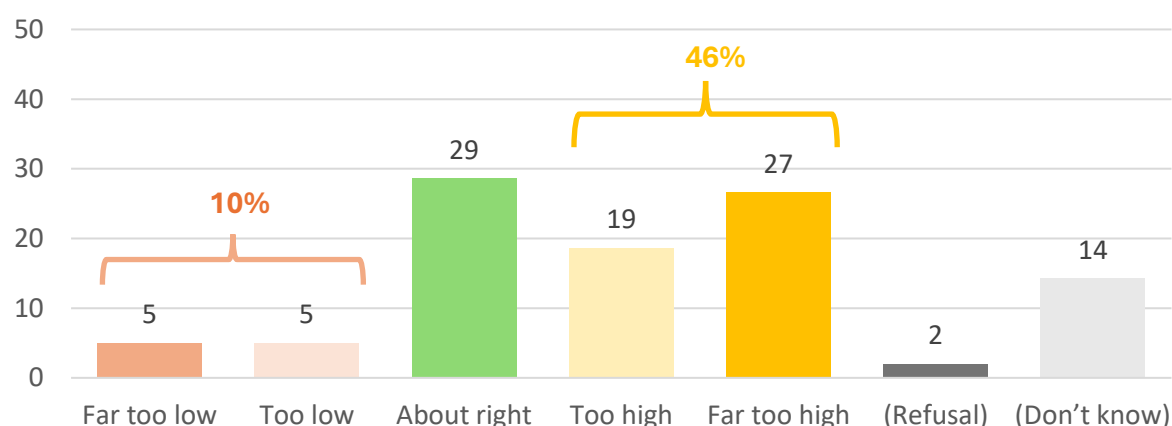
SASAS respondents were told that, at present, a person is allowed to donate a maximum amount of R15 million to a political party or independent candidate in a year. After this brief explanation, respondents were asked if they thought that the maximum donation amount was too low, too high or about right. By and large, as could be observed from **Figure 16**, public opinion on the donation limit for political parties is mixed. Nearly half of the adult population said that the

¹⁴ An ordered logistic regression analysis was performed to examine the determinants of survey responses, excluding those who selected "don't know." Using a sample of 2,525 respondents, the model incorporated factors such as age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The analysis produced statistically significant results (Wald $\chi^2(18) = 99$, $\text{Prob} > \chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.031$), suggesting that these variables collectively influenced participants' answers.

¹⁵ An ordered logistic regression analysis was carried out to examine the factors influencing survey responses, omitting participants who selected "don't know." The study, which included a sample of 2,386 individuals, considered age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The model produced statistically significant findings (Wald $\chi^2(18) = 93$, $\text{Prob} > \chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.034$), suggesting that these factors collectively impacted respondents' answers.

amount was either too high (19%) or far too high (27%). A significant segment (29%) said that the amount was about right and only a small fraction indicated that it was either too low (5%) or far too low (5%). A notable minority of the population (14%) reported that they were unsure of how to respond to this question. These findings suggest that a substantial portion of the public view the current donation cap as too weak, highlighting a public tendency to favour tighter controls on political donations.

Figure 16: Percentage of the population who think the donation maximum limit of R15 million rand was too low, too high or about right

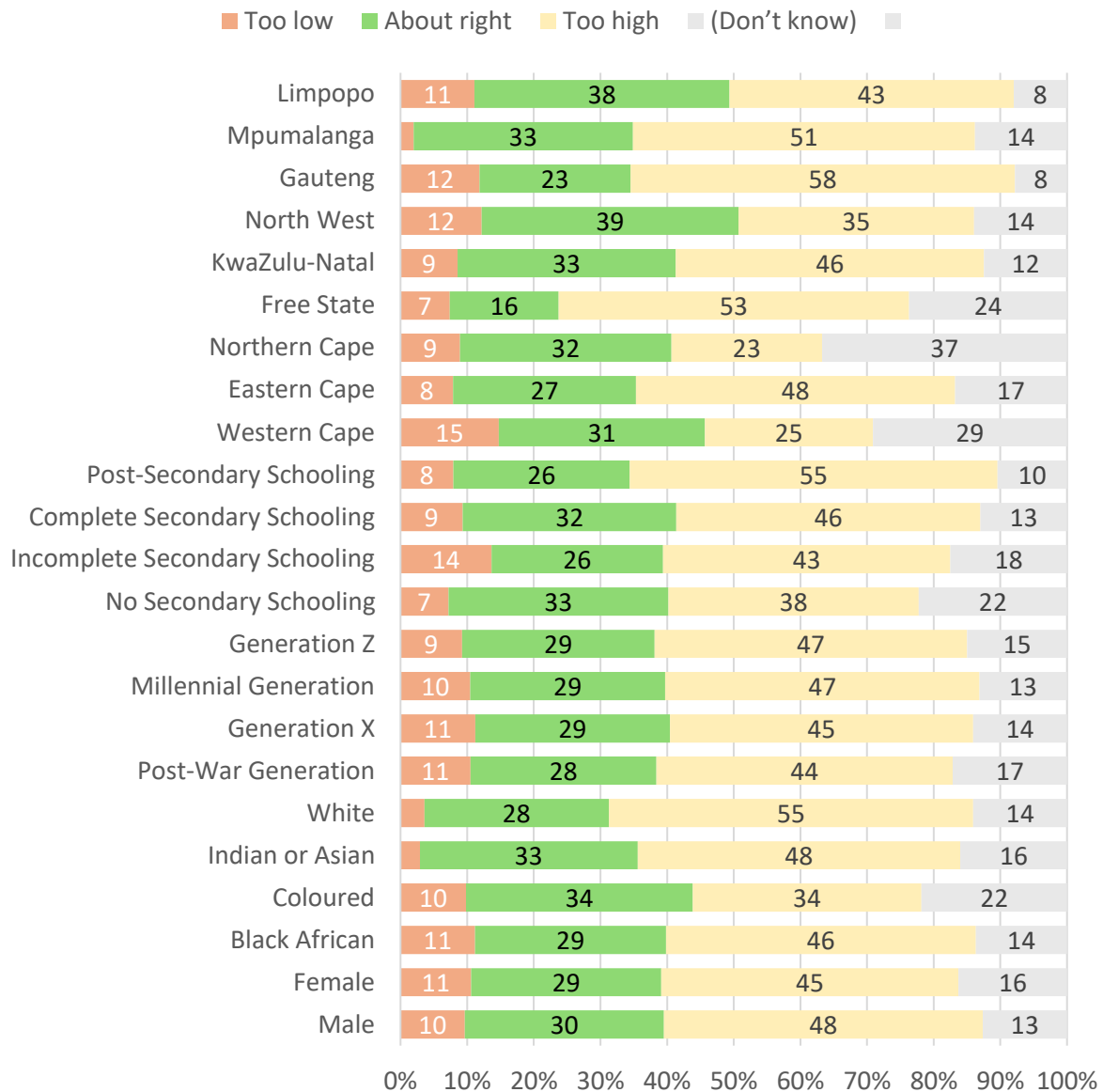


Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

To enhance the reader's understanding of how support for donation limits differs across socio-demographic groups a subgroup analysis was calculated, and the results are presented in **Figure 17**. The analysis revealed noticeable differences among population groups; adults from the white group were, on average, more inclined to believe that the current donation limit was too weak. We found that 55% of white adults thought the limit was too high, 8 percentage points higher than the black African majority. However, this population group bias remain statistically significant once other socio-demographic factors are controlled for.¹⁶ Being a white adult decreased the odds of favouring a low limit by 75%. Although **Figure 17** does show differences by age and gender, these variations are not statistically significant after taking other factors (such as education level and province of residence) into account. Educated persons were found to be much more likely than their less educated counterparts to think the limitation was too high. More than half (55%) of those with a post-secondary qualification thought the limit was too high. This figure is 9 percentage points above the national average and 17 percentage points greater than those without any secondary education.

¹⁶ An multinomial logistic regression analysis was performed to examine the determinants of survey responses. This specification allowed respondents who selected "don't know" to be included. The study, utilizing a sample of 3,023 respondents, incorporated variables such as age, gender, population group, education level, province, geotype. The model generated statistically significant results (Wald $\chi^2(51) = 236$, Prob> $\chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.055$), suggesting that these factors jointly affected participants' responses.

Figure 17: Percentage of the population who think the donation maximum limit was too high or too low across different socio-demographic subgroups (row percentages)



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

Views on donation limits did not seem to vary significantly between urban and rural dwellers. Individuals in rural areas were only slightly more likely to support stricter donation restrictions compared to their urban counterparts. *But* when taking into account other socio-demographic factors (such as gender, age, and population group), urban residence actually had a significant effect on thinking that the maximum is too high. Being an urban resident decreased the chance of thinking that the limit was too high by 33%. It is possible that more rural residents are more attuned to the role played by corruption in politics; corruption is, after all, quite common in the country's villages and farms. This may make those in rural areas more likely to understand the need for transparency and accountability in the donation process. Additionally, there are substantial provincial differences; for instance, the donation cap is perceived as too high in the

Free State, Mpumalanga and Gauteng, with over half of the adult population in these provinces expressing this opinion.

It is possible that politically engaged individuals might view election campaign donations as too low because they believe that restrictive limits constrain the ability of candidates to fund robust, competitive campaigns. However, looking at those who donated to a political party or independent candidate before, it was apparent that this group was not more likely than their counterparts to think that the donation limit was too high. More than a fifth (21%) of this group thought that the present limit was too low; 12 percentage points above the national average. Even after adjusting for socio-demographic factors, having donated before was associated with a 56% reduction in the likelihood of perceiving the maximum limit as excessive.¹⁷ In addition, having donated before was also found to reduce the odds that a person would respond 'don't know' when answering the question by 75%.

Table 7: Percentage of the population who think the donation maximum limit was too high or too low by support for laws like the Political Funding Act (PFA) (column percentages)

	Supported Laws		Neutral		Opposed Laws		Uncertain	
Far too low	5%	(1.216)	5%	(1.357)	9%	(4.497)	5%	(0.422)
Too low	7%	(1.068)	4%	(1.222)	5%	(1.413)	5%	(0.699)
About right	30%	(2.193)	41%	(3.272)	21%	(2.886)	9%	(2.240)
Too high	23%	(2.304)	16%	(2.611)	21%	(2.731)	9%	(1.701)
Far too high	31%	(2.465)	23%	(3.366)	39%	(3.687)	11%	(1.915)
(Refusal)	1%	(0.324)	1%	(0.390)	3%	(1.217)	7%	(1.801)
(Don't know)	3%	(0.757)	11%	(1.528)	2%	(0.791)	61%	(3.211)
Total	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

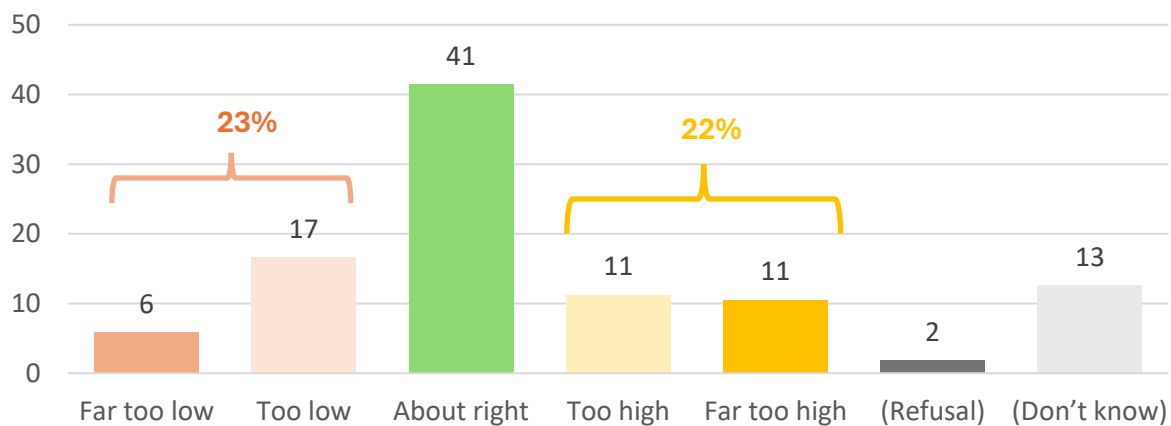
Public attitudes towards the donation maximum limit by support for the regulation of political finances are presented in **Table 7**. How an individual felt about donation limits was found to be correlated with how they thought about laws like the PFA. If a person opposed laws like the PFA, then they were more likely to think that the maximum donation limit was too high. We observed that more than three-fifths (61%) of this group thought that limitations were too high; 15 percentage points above the national average. This outcome demonstrates that negative perceptions of the laws similar to the PFA are strongly linked to more restrictive views on donation limits. Political party membership also shaped how people thought about donation limits. Being a member of a political party seem to make a person more likely than their peers to think that current limits were too low.

¹⁷ A multinomial logistic regression analysis was carried out to explore the factors influencing survey responses, allowing the inclusion of "don't know" responds. Using a sample of 3,023 participants, the model incorporated variables such as age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The results were statistically significant (Wald $\chi^2(54) = 260$, Prob> $\chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.061$), demonstrating that these factors together impacted respondents' answers.

4.2.6. Perceptions of donation thresholds

In the SASAS survey, respondents were informed that under current rules, political parties and independent candidates are required to report any donation of R100,000 or more. After this explanation, respondents were asked whether they believed this threshold was too low, too high, or about right. Overall, opinions on the donation threshold were quite divided; there is a distinct lack of consensus among the public regarding whether the current threshold is appropriate (**Figure 18**). Approximately one-quarter of the adult population felt that the amount was excessive, with 11% stating it was too high and 11% considering it far too high. A substantial minority (41%) thought the limit was about right, while only a small proportion indicated it was too low (17%) or far too low (6%). Additionally, 13% of all adults reported being uncertain about how to answer the question.

Figure 18: Percentage of the population who think the threshold that political parties and independent candidates must report donations of R100,000 was too low, too high or about right

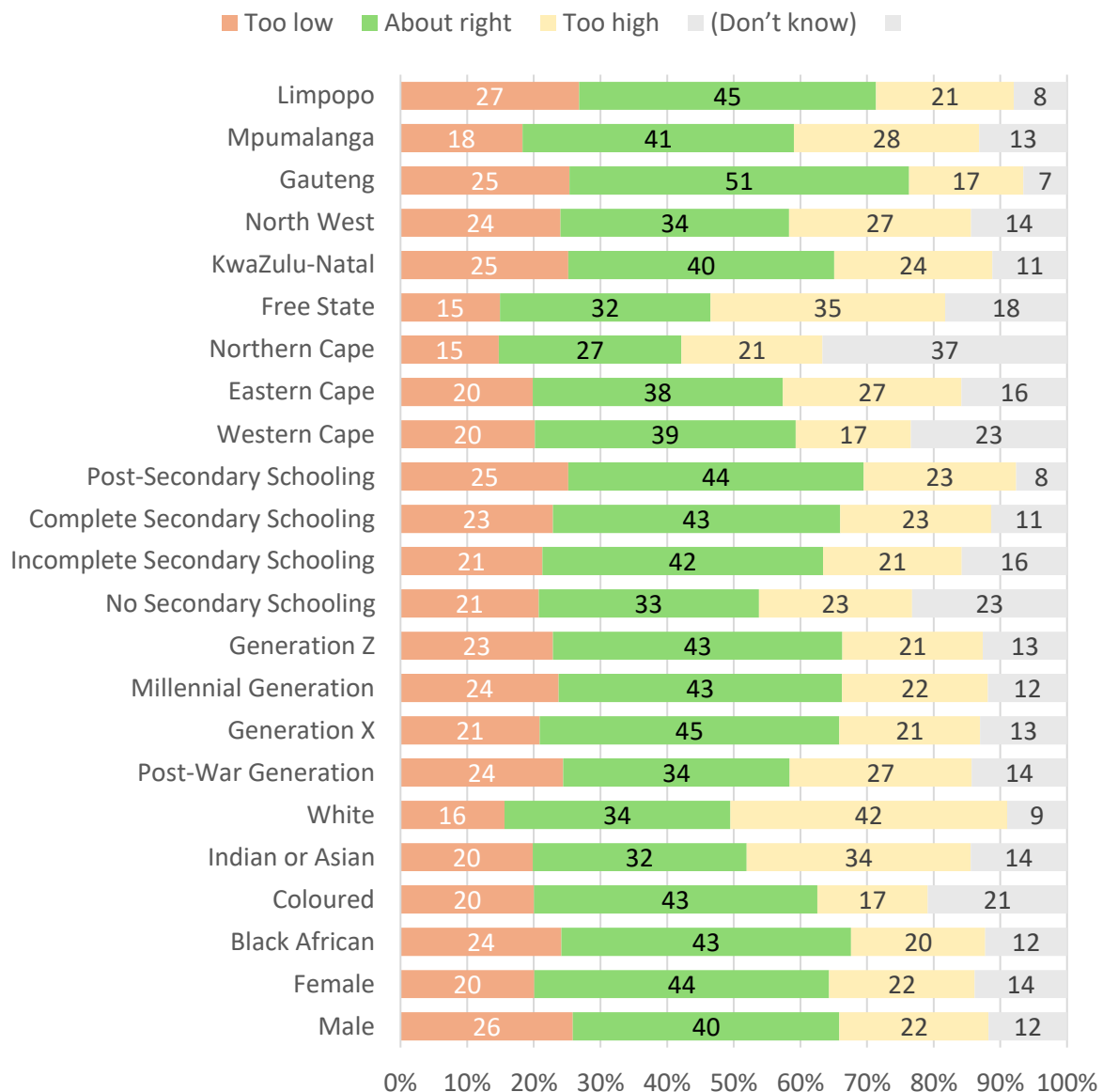


Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

To provide a clearer picture of how opinions on donation limits vary across socio-demographic groups a subgroup analysis was conducted, and the findings are illustrated in **Figure 19**. The analysis revealed significant differences among population groups. White adults were, on average, more likely to consider the current donation thresholds excessive, with approximately two-fifths (18% too high and 23% far too high) expressing this view. This bias among white adults remained statistically significant even after accounting for factors such as educational attainment, age, and province of residence.¹⁸ There are substantial provincial differences in how people thought about the donation threshold. Adults residing in the Free state and the Northern Cape provinces were less likely than other provincial residents to think that the threshold was too low. Additionally, there were notable attitudinal differences by socio-economic status. When compared to those in lower socio-economic brackets, individuals in higher socio-economic groups tended to view the threshold as too high. However, once other socio-demographic factors were controlled for, the socio-economic effect was no longer statistically significant.

¹⁸ An ordered logistic regression analysis was conducted to investigate the factors shaping survey responses, omitting those who answered "don't know." The analysis, based on a sample of 2,166 respondents, included variables such as age, gender, population group, education level, province, and socio-economic status. The model yielded statistically significant findings (Wald $\chi^2(17) = 72$, Prob> $\chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.020$), indicating that these factors collectively influenced participants' responses.

Figure 19: Percentage of the population who think the donation threshold was too high or too low across different socio-demographic subgroups (row percentages)



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

Political party affiliation was not found to influence opinions on donation thresholds. Party members were not more inclined than their peers to believe that the current limit is insufficient. Those who had previously donated to a political party or independent candidate initially appeared more likely to view the threshold as too low compared to others. However, once additional socio-demographic factors were taken into account, the effect of past donation behaviour was no longer statistically significant. Awareness of the PFA was found to inform how people saw donation thresholds. The more aware a person was of the PFA, the more likely they were to see the threshold as too low. If we controlled for socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., age or population group) then being aware of the PFA still increased the likelihood of thinking

that the threshold was too low.¹⁹ For a one unit increase on the awareness scale, the likelihood of thinking that the limit was too low increased by 26%.

Table 8: Percentage of the population who think the donation threshold was too high or too low by support for laws like the Political Funding Act (PFA) (column percentages)

	Supported Laws		Neutral		Opposed Laws		Uncertain	
Far too low	9%	(1.461)	4%	(1.068)	5%	(1.751)	1%	(0.319)
Too low	24%	(2.059)	11%	(1.885)	14%	(2.429)	9%	(2.165)
About right	45%	(2.604)	54%	(3.308)	36%	(4.233)	13%	(2.003)
Too high	11%	1.453)	12%	(1.999)	16%	(2.354)	7%	(1.563)
Far too high	8%	(1.030)	8%	(1.407)	24%	(3.086)	9%	(1.974)
(Refusal)	0%	(0.285)	1%	(0.388)	2%	(1.069)	7%	(1.802)
(Don't know)	3%	(0.625)	9%	(1.454)	2%	(0.908)	54%	(3.281)
Total	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

Individual attitudes toward donation limits were only modestly linked to their views on political financial regulations. The data depicted in **Table 8** revealed that those opposed to laws like the PFA were more likely to consider the donation threshold excessive. Approximately two-fifths (41%) of those who opposed laws like the PFA thought the limits were too high; 19 percentage points above the national average. Even after accounting for socio-demographic factors, opposition to laws like the PFA significantly increased the likelihood of perceiving the threshold as too high; in fact, for every one-unit increase on the support-oppose scale, the odds of thinking the limit were too high rose by 44%.²⁰ These findings indicate that negative perceptions of the political financial regulations were strongly associated with adopting more restrictive views on donation limits. Comparing this finding with what was observed in the previous section, it would appear that public concerns about the threshold are a better predictor of support for laws like the PFA than concerns about the donation limit.

4.3. Public attitudes towards the role of the Electoral Commission

Researching public opinion on the ability of the Electoral Commission to regulate political donations in South Africa is important because it helps assess whether citizens trust the mechanisms in place to ensure transparency and accountability in political financing. Understanding these opinions can guide policymakers in designing reforms that address public

¹⁹ A multinomial logistic regression analysis was conducted to examine the factors affecting survey responses, including participants who chose a non-response option. The baseline category was set as 'about right.' The study analysed data from 2,723 respondents and adjusted for variables such as age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The model produced statistically significant results (Wald $\chi^2(54) = 181$, Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.046$), indicating that these factors collectively influenced the participants' answers.

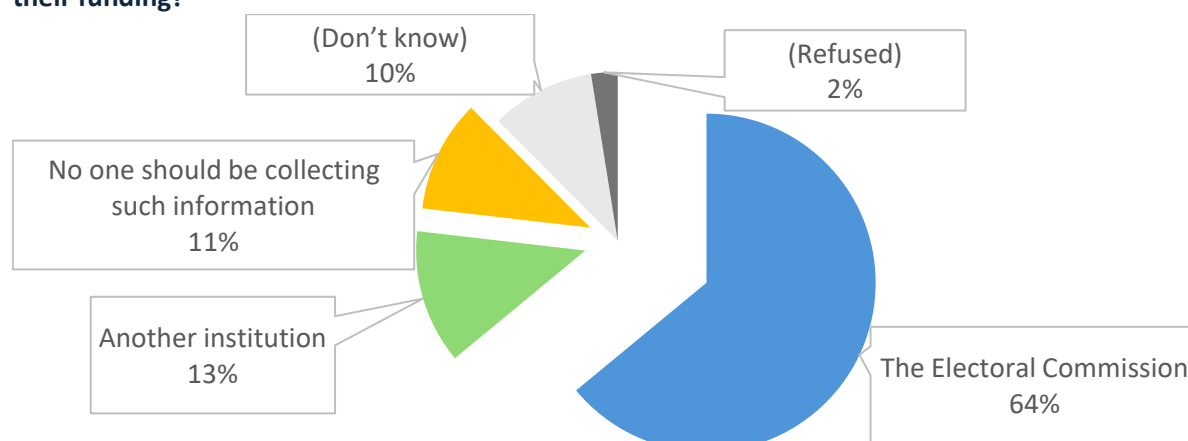
²⁰ An ordered logistic regression analysis was carried out to explore the factors influencing survey responses, excluding those who selected "don't know." Using a sample of 2m359 respondents, the analysis considered variables such as age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The model produced statistically significant results (Wald $\chi^2(21) = 149$, Prob> $\chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.035$), demonstrating that these factors collectively shaped participants' answers.

concerns, enhance civic engagement, and strengthen the overall legitimacy of the political system. In the first part of this section, we investigate who people thought should primarily collect data on where political parties and independent candidates obtain their funding. Next, we examine how people rated the importance of collecting data on political party and candidate spending by the Electoral Commission. Third, we looked at how important people thought it was for the Commission to collect data on political party and candidate funding sources. Then we change track and looked at confidence in the work of the Commission. First, we evaluated public confidence in the Commission’s ability to accurately collect data on political party and candidate funding sources. Second, we evaluated public confidence in the Electoral Commission’s capability to enforce compliance with the PFA.

4.3.1. Support for Electoral Commission oversight of political funding information

Survey participants in SASAS were queried on who should be primarily responsible for collecting information about where political parties and independent candidates in South Africa get their funding from. A clear majority (64%) of the general public think that it should be the Electoral Commission of South Africa (**Figure 20**). A tenth of the adult public thought no organisation should be collecting this sort of information. More or less a twelfth of all adults believed that an institution other than the Electoral Commission should be tasked with gathering data about where politicians get their funding from. Some opted not to respond to the question; 10% said that they did not know how to answer and 3% refused to answer. The empirical evidence, on the whole, indicates a clear preference for the Electoral Commission as the designated authority for tracking the sources of funding for political parties and independent candidates.

Figure 20: Public responses to the question: “In your opinion, who should be primarily responsible for collecting information about where political parties and independent candidates in South Africa get their funding?”

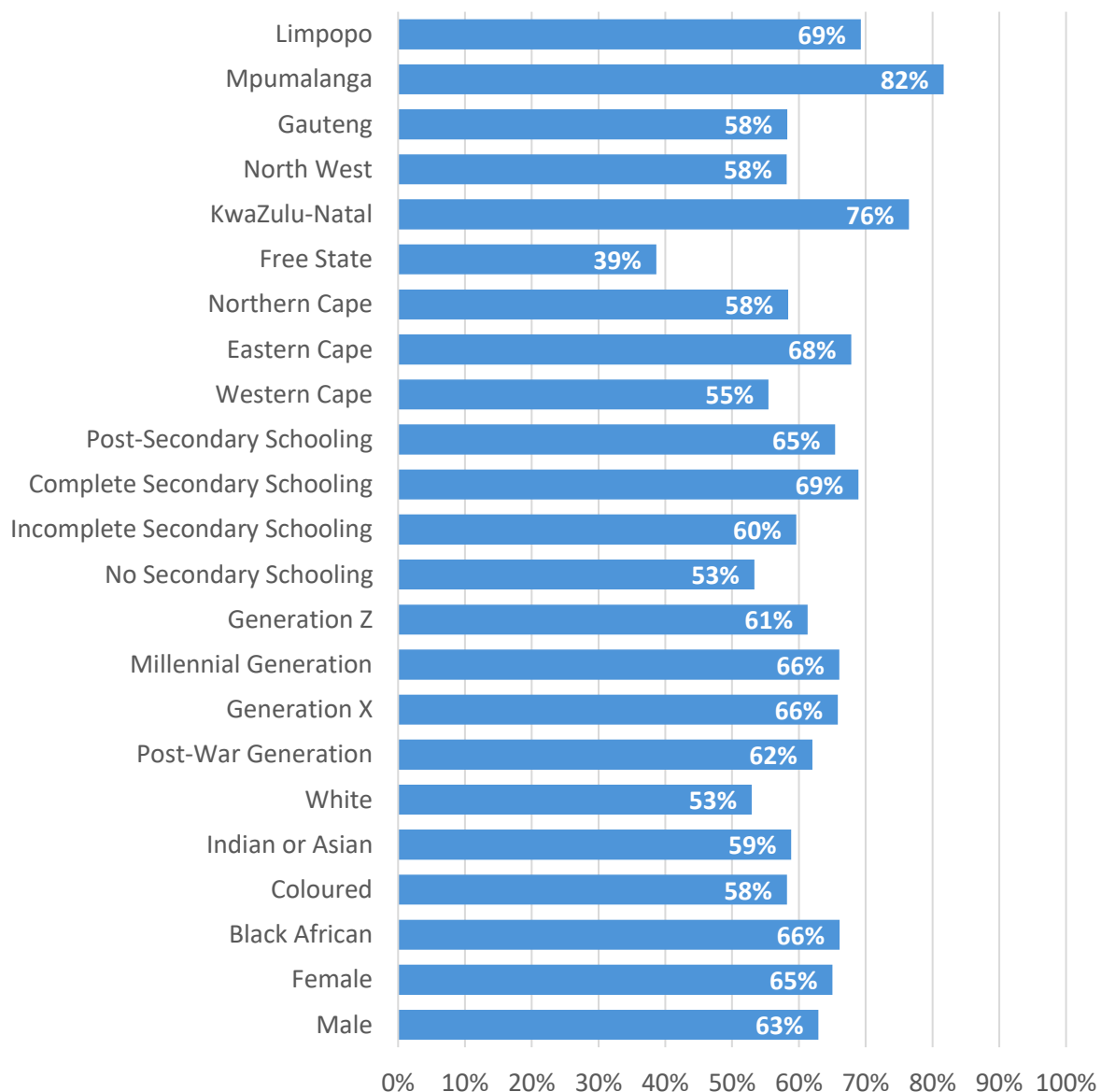


Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

There was notable differences in how dissimilar socio-demographic groups responded to the question on information gathering responsibility. As can be observed from **Figure 21**, there were moderate variations in how the responsibility question was answered based on educational attainment. Individuals with higher levels of education were more inclined to select the Electoral Commission as the primary body for collecting data on the funding sources of political parties and independent candidates. Consider, for example, that 53% of those with no secondary school

selected the Commission. This figure is 9 percentage points below the national average. The educational attainment differential was primarily due to higher non-response amongst the less educated. A similar pattern emerged when examining how responses varied by socio-economic status. People in rural areas were found to be somewhat more likely to believe that the Commission should be responsible than their urban counterparts. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of rural dwellers backed the Commission; 12 percentage points above what was seen for urban residents.

Figure 21: Percentage who said that the Electoral Commission should be primarily responsible for collecting information, by select socio-demographic subgroups



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

There were discernible differences by province of residence in how people answered the primary responsibility question. Preferences for the Electoral Commission were found to be highest in Mpumalanga, 82% of adults in that province thought that the Commission should be

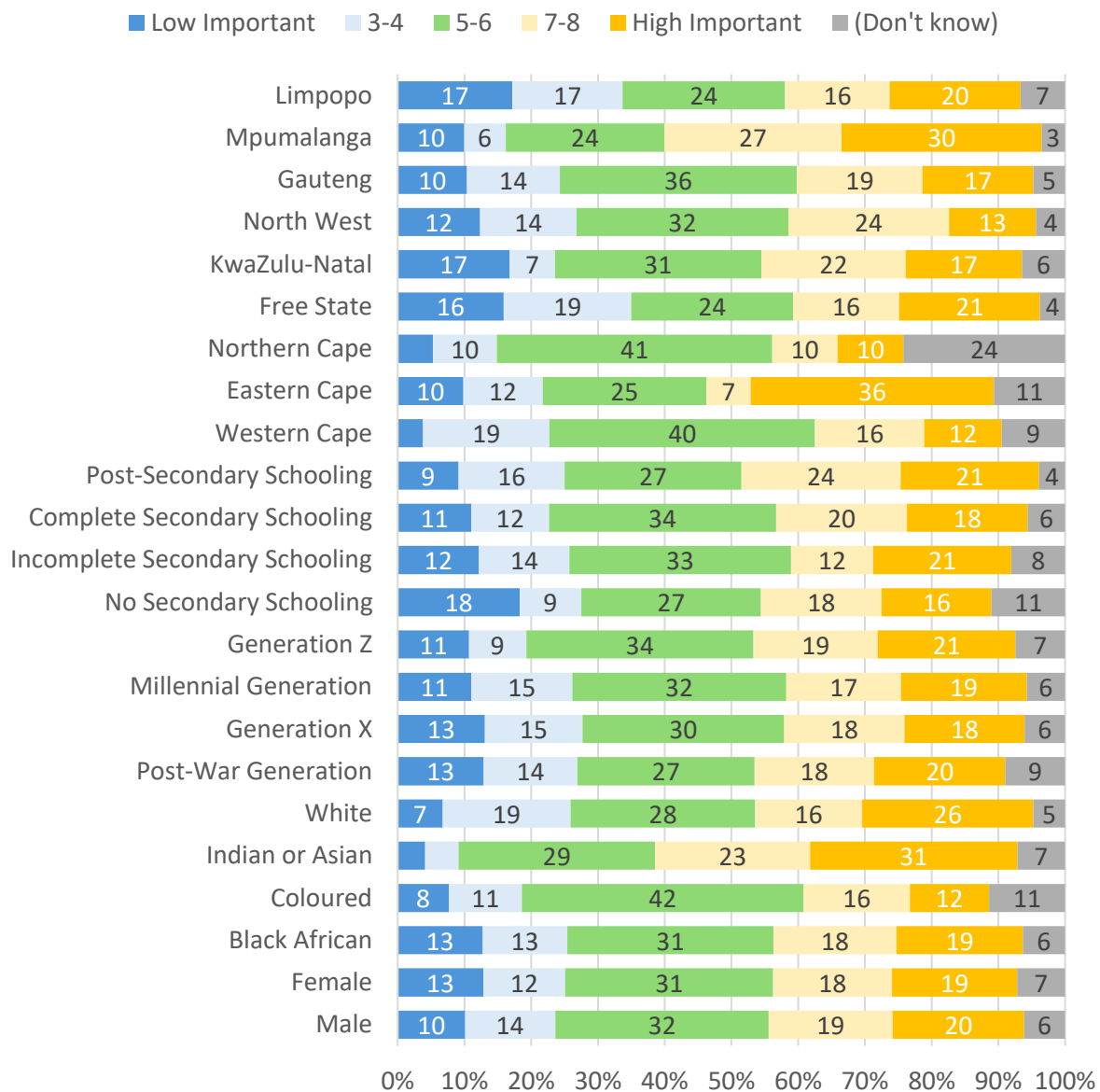
responsible for information collection. Adults in KwaZulu-Natal also exhibited a greater preference for the Commission that were well above the national average. When compared to other provinces, adults in the Free State were the least likely to select the Commission. But this was not due to a preference for another institution *per se*, it can be better attributed to high non-response in the Free State. There were notable population group differences in preferences in **Figure 21**. Adult members of the white population group were found to be, on average, more opposed to having the Electoral Commission be primarily responsible than other population groups. A fifth of white adults said that they thought another group should be responsible; this is 10 percentage points higher than what was observed for the black African majority.

Data analysis revealed that the politically active are significantly more likely to favour the Electoral Commission as the body responsible for collecting information on the funding sources of political parties and independent candidates. Active political party members were more likely to favour assigning the responsibility of collecting information to the Electoral Commission. This group can, in particular, be unfavourably compared to those who do not support a political party. Non-supporters were more likely to respond ‘don’t know’ when asked about who should be responsible for collecting information. Voters also demonstrated a greater tendency to select the Electoral Commission as the organisation that they thought should be responsible. Consider, for example, that less than half (48%) of non-voters believed that the Electoral Commission should be responsible. This figure is 24 percentage points lower than what we see for regular voters and 14 percentage points lower than irregular voters.

4.3.2. Views on importance of Electoral Commission tracking political spending

During the SASAS interview with respondents, fieldworkers asked the question: “how important is it for the Electoral Commission to collect information on how much money political parties and independent candidates in South Africa are spending?” Participants were asked to rate the importance on a scale from 0 to 10, with higher numbers indicating the greater level of importance. A small share (11%) of adults considered it of low importance, giving the issue an importance score of 2 or lower. Around one-eighth (13%) rated it between 3 and 4, while 32% assigned it a score between 5 and 6. A relatively larger segment gave this issue a higher importance rating with 18% scoring it between 7 and 8 and 19% awarding it a 9 or 10. A small minority (7%) of the mass public were uncertain and answered “don’t know” when faced with this question.

Figure 22: Perceived importance cohorts on collect information on political expenditure by select socio-demographic attributes (row percentages)



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

There were no noticeable generational variations in how people responded to the importance of information collection question (**Figure 22**). Older adults were not more likely than other generations to view this as an important task for the Electoral Commission than their younger counterparts. There was a considerable degree of provincial variation in how people thought about the importance of the Electoral Commission collecting information on political expenditure. Residents were quite negative on this issue in the Western Cape and the Northern Cape. Only about a quarter of the adult populations in these two provinces rated the importance of this issue as a 7 or above. This can be contrasted with Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape where people tended to be more positive about the importance of collecting information. Even if a multivariate analysis was used to control for various socio-demographic characteristics (e.g.,

educational attainment or province of residence), living in Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape still decreased the likelihood of viewing information collection as important²¹.

Even though **Figure 22** displays differences by age and gender, these variations become statistically insignificant once other factors are accounted for. There was a relationship between the way people answered the importance of collecting information question and socio-economic status. If a person was located in one of the high socio-economic groups, then they were more likely to think it was important for the Electoral Commission to track the spending of political parties and independent candidates. Indeed, nearly a third (30%) of those in the high socio-economic group gave the Commission a score of 9 or 10. This is 11 percentage points above the national average and 14 percentage points above those in the low socio-economic groups. Even after controlling for various socio-demographic factors through multivariate analysis, socio-economic status remained positively associated with perceiving information collection as important.²² This may be due to the fact that more affluent people are more exposed to financial processes which in turn heightens their awareness of the importance of financial transparency and accountability.

Table 9: Perceived importance cohorts on collect information on political expenditure by past political donation behaviour (column percentages)

	Past Participation		Non-Participant (Intention)		Non-Participant (No Intention)	
Low Importance	15%	(3.211)	9%	(1.887)	12%	(1.249)
3-4	28%	(4.439)	12%	(2.319)	12%	(1.540)
5-6	32%	(5.399)	23%	(3.275)	34%	(1.866)
7-8	10%	(3.026)	27%	(3.856)	17%	(1.425)
High Importance	12%	(3.607)	27%	(3.784)	18%	(1.258)
(Do not know)	2%	(1.054)	2%	(0.790)	7%	(0.861)
Total	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

Engagement in political donations was linked to how important individuals perceived tracking political spending to be (**Table 9**). People with a history of donating to a political party or independent candidate were less likely to consider this issue critical. Our analysis showed that roughly 22% of past donors gave an importance score of 7 or higher; 15 percentage points lower than those who had never donated. This suggests that firsthand experience with the donation process may lead individuals to be cynical about oversight and make them skeptical about the

²¹ A linear ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis was carried out to explore the factors affecting survey responses, excluding those who answered "don't know." The study included 2,800 participants and accounted for variables such as age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The model yielded statistically significant findings ($F(18, 2780) = 6$, $\text{Prob} > F = 0.000$; $\text{Adj } R^2 = 0.033$), indicating that these factors together had a significant influence on the respondents' answers.

²² A linear ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was performed to examine the factors influencing survey responses, excluding participants who selected "don't know." The analysis, conducted on a sample of 2,858 individuals, controlled for age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The model produced statistically significant results ($F(18, 2839) = 6$, $\text{Prob} > F = 0.000$; $\text{Adj } R^2 = 0.050$), suggesting that these variables collectively impacted respondents' answers.

need for the Electoral Commission to monitor this issue. Public support for laws like the PFA was linked to the perceived importance of the Electoral Commission tracking political spending. Even after controlling for various other factors, higher perceived importance was associated with greater support for the regulation of political donations.²³ Each one-unit increase on the importance scale corresponded to a 25% higher likelihood of endorsing laws like the PFA.

If a person thought that no one should be chiefly responsible for gathering financial donation data on political parties and independent candidates, then they tended to think that it was not important for the Electoral Commission to collect information on political finances. We found that roughly two-fifths (44%) of those who thought that the Commission should be responsible for collecting information about where political parties and independent candidates get their funding had a score on the importance scale of 7 or above. This figure was 7 percentage points higher than the national average and 18 percentage points higher than those who thought that the Electoral Commission should not be responsible. The association between responsibility preferences and perceived importance remains significant even after adjusting for various socio-demographic factors.²⁴ For a one unit increase on the importance scale, the likelihood of favouring the Commission to be responsible increased by 13%.

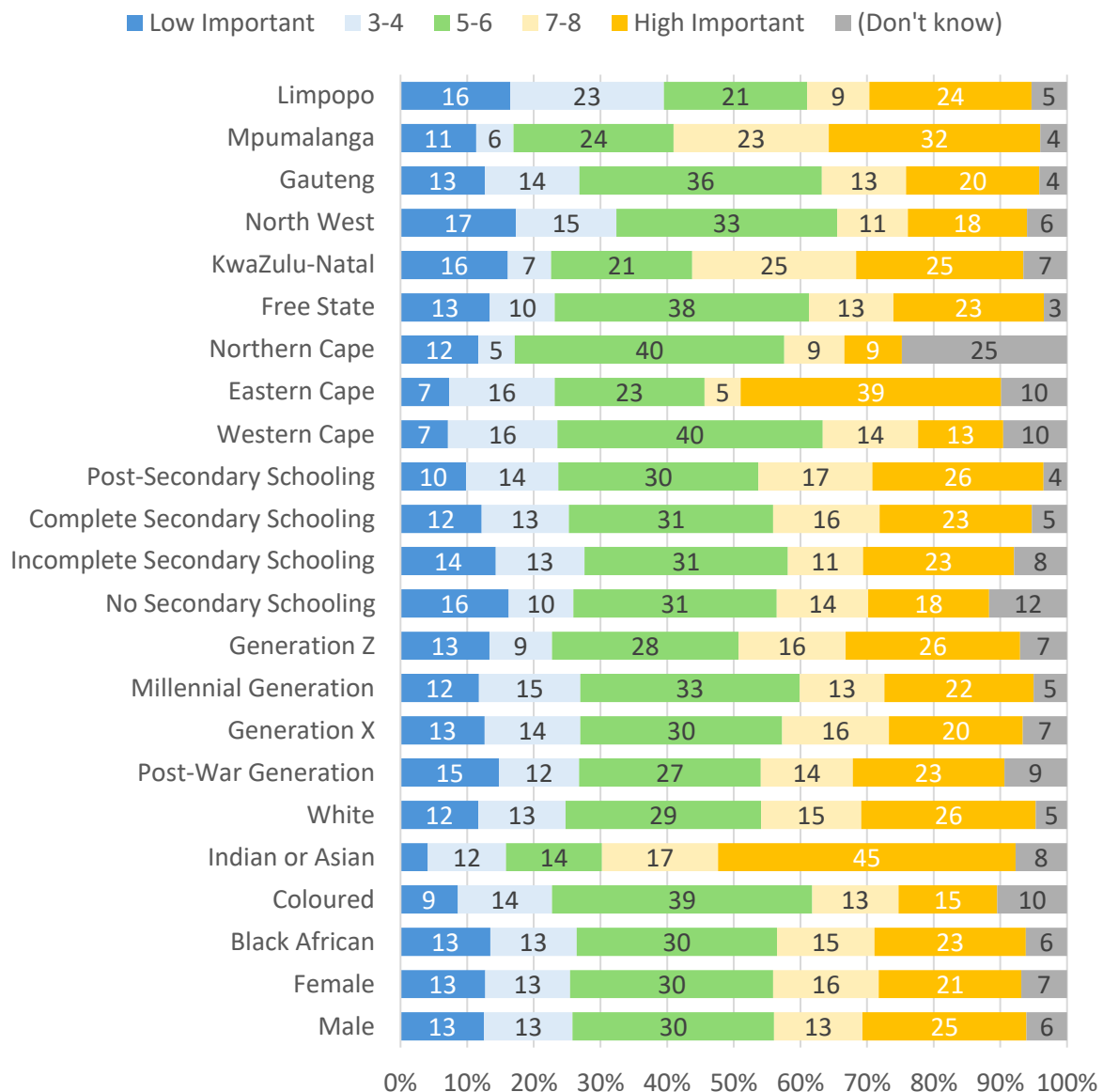
4.3.3. Importance of Electoral Commission tracking political funding sources

During the SASAS interview, respondents were asked to rate the importance of the Electoral Commission gathering information on the funding sources of political parties and independent candidates in South Africa. Participants needed to place their answer on a scale from 0 to 10, where higher scores indicate greater importance. A small portion of adults (13%) deemed it of low importance, assigning a score of 2 or less. Approximately 13% rated its importance between 3 and 4, while 30% gave it a score between 5 and 6. A relatively larger group offered high ratings, with 15% scoring it between 7 and 8 and 23% giving the issue a score of 9 or 10. Less than a tenth (6%) of the mass public were uncertain of how to answer and responded with “don’t know.” How people felt about this type of information gathering was assessed across dissimilar socio-demographic subgroups, the results were displayed in **Figure 23**.

²³ An ordered logistic regression analysis was conducted to examine the factors influencing survey responses, excluding participants who selected “don’t know.” The analysis, based on a sample of 2,500 individuals, controlled for age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The model produced statistically significant results (Wald $\chi^2(18) = 238$, Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.077$), suggesting that these factors collectively shaped respondents' answers.

²⁴ A multinomial logistic regression was performed to examine the factors influencing survey responses, permitting the inclusion of those who chose “don’t know.” The analysis, which included a sample of 2,858 participants, considered age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The model produced statistically significant results (Wald $\chi^2(18) = 124$, Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.078$), suggesting that these factors collectively shaped respondents' answers.

Figure 23: Perceived importance cohorts on collect information on political funding sources by select socio-demographic attributes (row percentages)



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

A subgroup analysis showed that the socio-demographic attributes associated with viewing collecting information on funding sources as important were similar to what was seen in the previous section. It would appear that there was a link between this issue and thinking that collecting data on how much money political parties and independent candidates are spending was important. Data analysis showed a robust (and positive) association between these two variables. Those who value tracking political funding sources also tended to think that monitoring party and candidate spending was important. Consider, for instance, that nearly three-quarters (71%) of those who viewed tracking political expenditures as highly important gave the Commission a score of 9 or 10 for collecting data on funding sources. This is 52 percentage points above the national average and 69 percentage points higher than those who

considered information gathering to be of low importance. It would appear that most people view both information gathering activities as equally important.

There was a clear relationship between how respondents rated the importance of collecting information on the source of party financing and their socio-economic status. Individuals in higher socio-economic groups were more likely to consider it essential for the Electoral Commission to track the sources of funding for political parties and independent candidates. We discovered that 48% of those in the high socio-economic group gave the Commission a score of 7 or above; 13 percentage points higher than those in lower socio-economic groups. Even after controlling for various socio-demographic factors through multivariate analysis, socio-economic status remained positively associated with the perceived importance of information collection.²⁵ This outcome may be due to more affluent individuals having greater exposure to financial processes. An analogous pattern was evident when analysing how perceptions of importance varied by educational attainment. Individuals with post-secondary education were more likely to view tracking the sources of political financing as important than their less educated peers. Persons with lower levels of education were also much more likely to respond “don’t know” to the importance of collecting information on financial sources question than other groups.

Table 10: Perceived importance cohorts on collect information on political funding sources, by levels of worry about the influence of political donations from the rich and powerful (column percentages)

	Not Worried		Somewhat Worried		Very Worried		Uncertain	
Low Importance	19%	(2.985)	11%	(1.498)	11%	(1.691)	10%	(2.848)
3-4	13%	(2.165)	14%	(1.619)	12%	(2.580)	4%	(2.155)
5-6	30%	(3.769)	43%	(2.752)	24%	(2.021)	15%	(3.848)
7-8	12%	(1.703)	12%	(1.619)	20%	(2.084)	3%	(1.273)
High Importance	22%	(3.104)	19%	(1.958)	33%	(2.352)	12%	(4.601)
(Don't know)	5%	(1.315)	1%	(0.477)	3%	(1.088)	55%	(5.488)
Total	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

Those who were concerned about wealthy donors influencing politics tended to think that the Electoral Commission should prioritise tracking the sources of political funding. Approximately half of those who were either very or extremely worried about elite manipulation of the political system rated the importance of gathering information on the sources at 7 or above (**Table 10**). This figure is 12 percentage points higher than the national average. People who are concerned about wealthy donors influencing politics may be more likely to see financial transparency as a safeguard against undue influence and corruption. If a person thought that the general public had too little information about who donates money to political parties and independent candidates, then they tended to think that it was important that the Electoral Commission collects data on funding sources. We discovered that just about half (46%) of those who thought

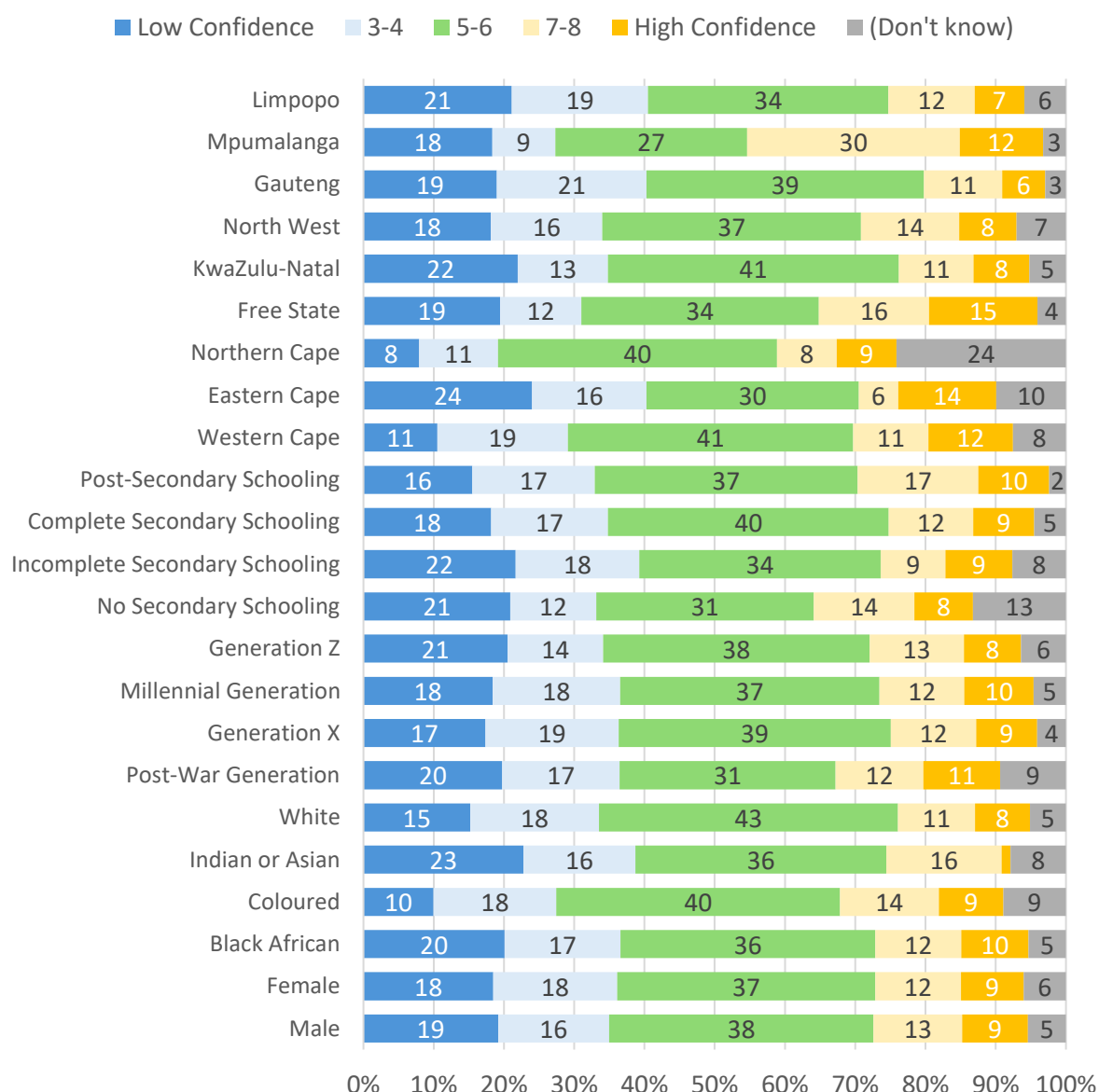
²⁵ A linear ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was carried out to investigate the factors affecting survey responses, excluding those who answered “don't know.” The analysis, based on a sample of 2,854 participants, adjusted for age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The model yielded statistically significant findings ($F(18, 2834) = 4$, $\text{Prob} > F = 0.000$; $\text{Adj } R^2 = 0.047$), indicating that these factors together influenced the respondents' answers.

the mass public had far too little information rated gathering information on the sources of funding as 'highly' important. This is 17 percentage points higher than those who thought that the public had enough information and 13 percentage points higher than those who believed that the public had too much information.

4.3.4. Confidence in Electoral Commission's ability to track political funding sources

SASAS respondents were requested to indicate how confident they were that the Electoral Commission had been able to collect accurate information about where political parties and independent candidates in South Africa get their funding from. Respondents were required to answer on a scale of 0 to 10 where the higher value signified the greater level of confidence. A significant proportion (19%) of the adult public had little confidence and gave the Commission a score of 2 or less. Almost a fifth (17%) of the general public scored the Commission between 3 and 4 while 37% put forward a score between 5 and 6. A minority of the adult population gave the Commission a high score, 12% of the public had a score between 7 and 8 while 9% scored the organisation 9 or 10. A small segment (6%) of the general public was unable to answer the question and responded "don't know".

Figure 24: Perceived confidence in the Electoral Commission cohorts on collect information on political funding sources by select socio-demographic attributes (row percentages)



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

Confidence in the Electoral Commission's ability to gather information on funding sources was discovered to be strongly associated with both educational attainment and socio-economic status. There were, as can be observed in **Figure 24**, notable variations in confidence levels across different educational backgrounds. Individuals with higher education were more likely to provide an answer to the question and less likely to respond with "don't know". For example, nearly 13% of those without secondary education responded "don't know" to this question; 11 percentage points above the national average. Moreover, more educated people generally exhibited greater confidence in the Electoral Commission. A similar pattern emerged when comparing responses by socio-economic status. More affluent individuals tended to have a more positive view of the Commission's capabilities on this issue than their poorer peers. Socio-

economic status remained a statistically significant predictor even after controlling for additional socio-demographic factors (such as gender, age, and province of residence)²⁶.

People in rural areas were found to be somewhat more confident in the Electoral Commission than their urban counterparts. Consider that about a quarter of rural dwellers scored the Commission a 7 or above on the confidence scale. This figure was 7 percentage points above what was seen for urban residents. There were noticeable provincial variations in how respondents rated their confidence in the Electoral Commission. When compared to other provinces, confidence was highest in Mpumalanga and the Free State. It was weakest, relatively speaking, in the Eastern Cape and the Northern Cape. In addition, significant differences were discovered between population groups. Black African adults generally expressed higher confidence in the Commission's ability to collect information whereas white adults were more critical. Although **Figure 24** shows variations based on age and gender, these differences do not reach statistical significance once other factors are controlled for.

If a person thought that the Electoral Commission should be chiefly responsible for gathering financial donation data on political parties and independent candidates, then they tended to have confidence in the Commission. We found that roughly a quarter (29%) of those who thought the Commission should be responsible had a confidence score of 7 or higher. The correlation between responsibility preferences and confidence holds even after controlling for a range of socio-demographic factors.²⁷ For a one unit increase on the confidence scale, the probability of favouring the Electoral Commission to be responsible increased by 17%. Perceived confidence in the Electoral Commission's ability to collect information about political financing is associated with public support for the regulation of political donations. Even taking a range of other factors into account, the confidence scale had a positive association with support for laws like the PFA.²⁸ For a one unit increase on the confidence scale, the likelihood of endorsing laws similar to the PFA increased by 14%.

There is a robust (and positive) association between the perceived importance of funding transparency and trust in the Commission's capabilities. If an individual thinks that it is important to collect information about where political parties and independent candidates get their

²⁶ A linear ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was conducted to examine the determinants of survey responses, excluding participants who answered "don't know." The analysis included 2,880 respondents and controlled for variables such as age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The results were statistically significant ($F(18, 2861) = 2$, $\text{Prob} > F = 0.000$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.030$), demonstrating that these factors collectively had a meaningful impact on the participants' responses.

²⁷ A logistic regression was conducted to explore the factors affecting survey responses, excluding individuals who selected "don't know." The analysis, based on a sample of 2,880 respondents, took into account age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The model yielded statistically significant results ($\text{Wald } \chi^2(18) = 122$, $\text{Prob} > \chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.087$), indicating that these variables collectively influenced the respondents' answers.

²⁸ A multinomial logistic regression was conducted to explore the factors affecting survey responses to the political donation question, including participants who selected "don't know." The analysis involved 2,880 individuals and accounted for age, gender, population group, education level, province, and urban status. The model yielded statistically significant findings ($\text{Wald } \chi^2(54) = 301$, $\text{Prob} > \chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.087$), indicating that these variables together influenced respondents' answers.

funding from, then they also tend to trust in the Electoral Commission’s ability to collect that information. Consider, for example, that more than a quarter (28%) of those who identified information gathering as highly important gave the Commission a confidence score of 9 or 10. This is 19 percentage points higher than the national average and 26 percentage points higher than those who rated the importance of information gathering as ‘low’. Political donation behaviour was found to be associated with confidence in the Commission’s abilities to manage this issue (**Table 11**). If a person had donated to a political party or independent candidate in the past, then they tended to have low levels of confidence in the Commission. This association remained constant even after controlling for a diverse set of socio-demographic factors²⁹. It would seem that direct experience with the donation process makes people more sceptical about the Commission’s ability to effectively monitor and report political contributions.

Table 11: Perceived confidence in the Electoral Commission cohorts on collect information on political funding sources, by political donation behaviour (column percentages)

	Past Participation		Non-Participant (Intention)		Non-Participant (No Intention)	
Low Confidence	23%	(4.130)	17%	(2.783)	19%	(1.486)
3-4	28%	(5.458)	17%	(3.743)	15%	(1.634)
5-6	36%	(4.878)	35%	(3.792)	38%	(1.883)
7-8	3%	(1.205)	16%	(3.369)	12%	(1.107)
High Confidence	9%	(2.771)	12%	(1.702)	9%	(1.113)
(Do not know)	2%	(1.202)	2%	(0.738)	6%	(0.681)
Total	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

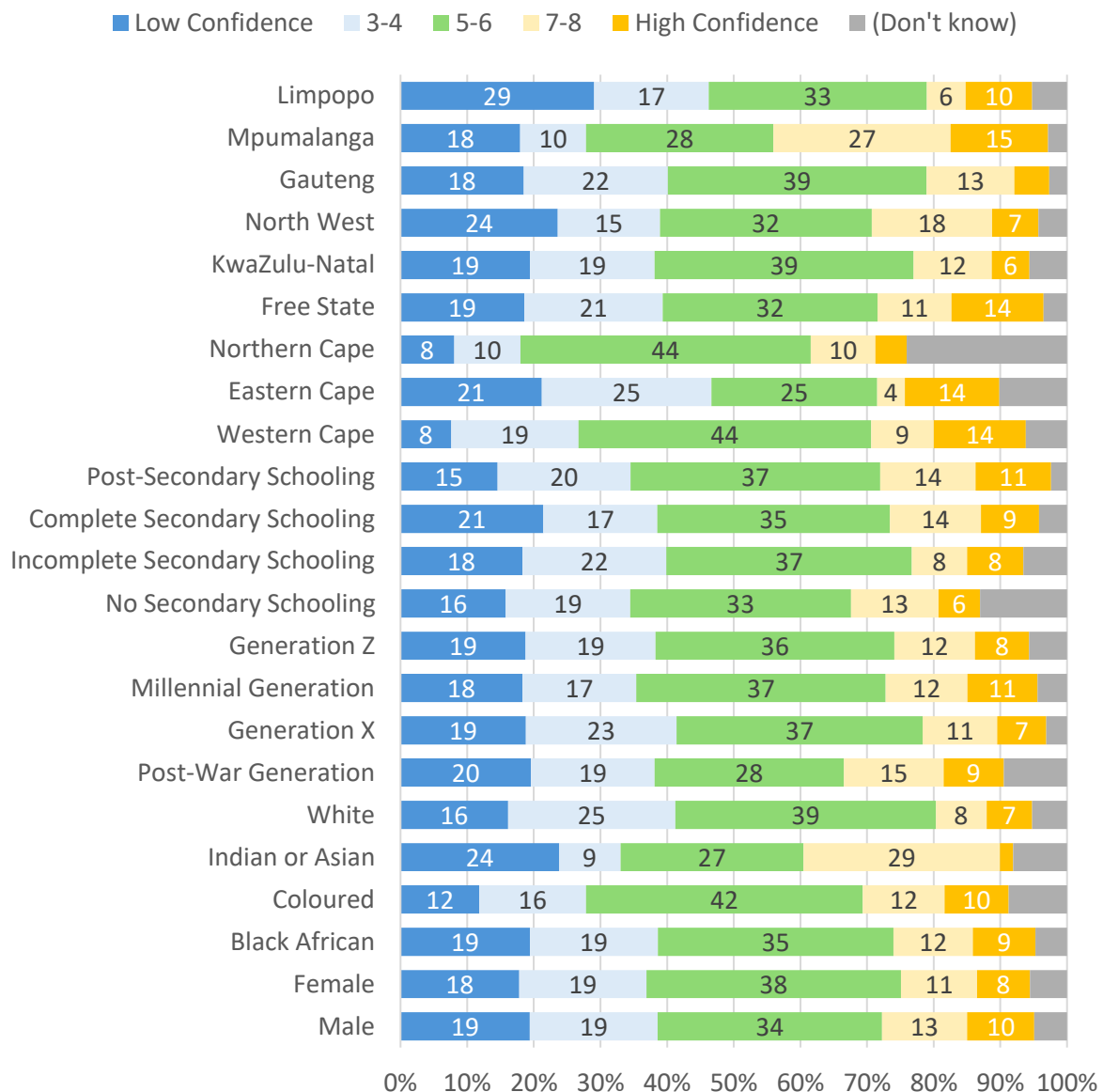
Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

4.3.5. Confidence in Electoral Commission’s ability to enforce Political Funding Act

During the SASAS survey, respondents were asked: “How confident are you that the Electoral Commission can take action against political parties and independent candidates who fail to comply with the PFA or provide inaccurate funding information?” Participants rated their confidence on a scale from 0 to 10, with higher scores indicating greater confidence. A notable share (19%) of adults expressed low confidence, giving the Commission a score of 2 or below, while 19% rated it between 3 and 4. The largest group (36%) provided a mid-range score of 5 or 6. High confidence was less common, with 12% scoring the Commission between 7 and 8, and only 9% awarding a 9 or 10. More than a twentieth (6%) of the general public were uncertain and answered “don’t know.” Confidence levels on this issue, measured across various socio-demographic subgroups, are presented in **Figure 25**. The pattern of results was, as may have been expected, similar to what was observed in the previous section.

²⁹ A linear ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was carried out to identify the factors influencing survey responses, excluding those who answered “don’t know.” The study analysed data from 2,880 respondents and adjusted for age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The findings were statistically significant ($F(18, 2861) = 2$, $\text{Prob} > F = 0.000$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.027$), indicating that these variables together significantly affected participants’ answers.

Figure 25: Perceived confidence in the Electoral Commission cohorts to enforce compliance with political financial regulation requirements, by select socio-demographic attributes (row percentages)



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

There is a robust (and positive) association between the confidence measure outlined above and perceived confidence in the ability of the Commission to collect information on funding sources. Those who were confident in the Commission's ability to track political funding sources also tend to think that the Commission can take action on issues of non-compliance. Consider, for example, that nearly three-quarters (72%) of those who were 'highly' confident about gathering information gave the Commission a score of 9 or 10 on the compliance confidence scale. This is 63 percentage points higher than the national average and 70 percentage points higher than those who rated their confidence in the data collection abilities of the Commission as 'low'. It would appear that most people used the same sense of overall confidence in the Commission's ability to administer the PFA to answer these two questions. This general confidence in the Commission's technical capabilities fosters a broader trust in its regulatory functions, leading

individuals to expect that it will effectively enforce the political finance regulations and hold political entities accountable.

Table 12: Perceived confidence in the Electoral Commission cohorts to enforce compliance with political financial regulation requirements, by levels of worry about the influence of political donations from the rich and powerful (column percentages)

	Not Worried		Somewhat Worried		Very Worried		Uncertain	
Low Confidence	22%	(2.579)	17%	(1.881)	19%	(1.917)	16%	(4.822)
3-4	25%	(3.785)	20%	(1.977)	16%	(1.886)	5%	(2.026)
5-6	35%	(3.698)	45%	(2.676)	31%	(2.786)	21%	(4.743)
7-8	9%	(1.600)	10%	(2.028)	18%	(1.886)	1%	(0.401)
High Confidence	5%	(1.105)	8%	(1.404)	13%	(1.872)	1%	(0.490)
(Don't know)	3%	(0.889)	1%	(0.302)	3%	(0.706)	56%	(5.561)
Total	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

Those who were concerned about wealthy donors influencing politics tended to have confidence in the ability of the Electoral Commission to take action against those who do not comply with the PFA or fail to provide accurate information on their funding. Roughly a third (31%) of those who were either very or extremely worried about elite manipulation of the political system rated the Commission a 7 or above on this measure (**Table 12**). This is 17 percentage points higher than those who were not worried and 14 percentage points higher than those who were somewhat worried. This outcome could be due to the fact that individuals who are concerned about wealthy donors influencing politics view the Electoral Commission as a crucial safeguard that can counteract elite dominance. In their view, the Commission's capacity to take action against non-compliant political parties and candidates is a key mechanism for levelling the playing field and protecting democratic processes from the undue influence of the wealthy.

If a person thought that they should have the freedom to donate to political parties and independent candidates, then they tended to have confidence in the ability of the Electoral Commission to take action against political parties and independent candidates that fail to comply with existing political financing regulations. We found that about a third (30%) of those who agreed that they should be free to donate gave the Commission a confidence rating of 7 or above. This is 21 percentage points higher than those who were neutral on this issue and 15 percentage points higher than those that thought people should not have this freedom. Individuals who believe in the freedom to donate to political parties likely see it as a way to enhance democratic participation, but they also expect that such freedom comes with strong oversight. They may trust that the Electoral Commission can effectively enforce the PFA, ensuring transparency and accountability in political financing. This confidence in regulatory enforcement reassures them that while the freedom to donate is granted, the process is still safeguarded against abuse and corruption, thereby protecting the integrity of the political system.

4.4. Attitudes towards the Multi-Party Democracy Fund

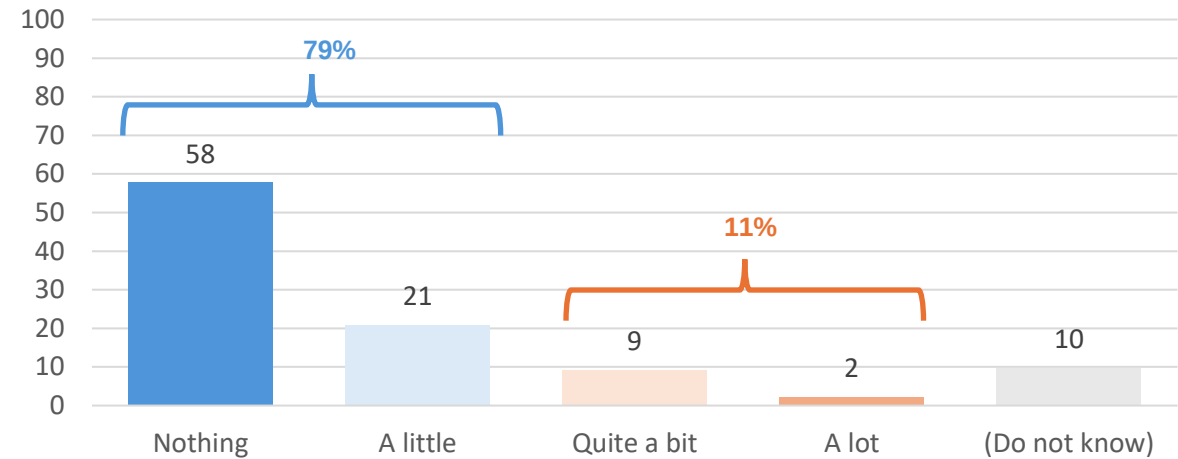
Studying public attitudes toward the Multi-Party Democracy Fund (MPDF) is crucial because it provides insight into how well citizens understand and support the fund's efforts to enhance

transparency and accountability in political financing. First, this section will look at public awareness of the MPDF, assessing how much people have read or heard about the fund. Then the section will examine public confidence in the Electoral Commission's ability to manage the MPDF. In the third section, we gauged how willing people were to donate to the fund. Following this analysis, we utilise open-ended textual data to understand the reasons why people may be willing to donate to the MPDF. Finally, we consider whether offering people tax relief may make them more willing to donate. This section will reveal gaps in public knowledge and areas where policy adjustments are needed to ensure that all segments of society are effectively benefiting from the MPDF.

4.4.1. Awareness of the MPDF

Examining how much the general public have heard or read about the MPDF is important because it provides critical insights into the level of public awareness and engagement with political financing issues. In South Africa, where transparency in political funding is a key concern, understanding how informed citizens are about the MPDF can help assess the effectiveness of public outreach and education efforts. It also serves as an indicator of the public's ability to hold political parties accountable, as higher awareness may correlate with more robust scrutiny of political donations. Furthermore, analysing responses by different socio-demographic groups can reveal disparities in information access and help policymakers tailor interventions to ensure that all segments of society are adequately informed about initiatives that affect democratic processes and political accountability.

Figure 26: Public responses to the question: “How much have you heard or read about the Multi-Party Democracy Fund?” (%)

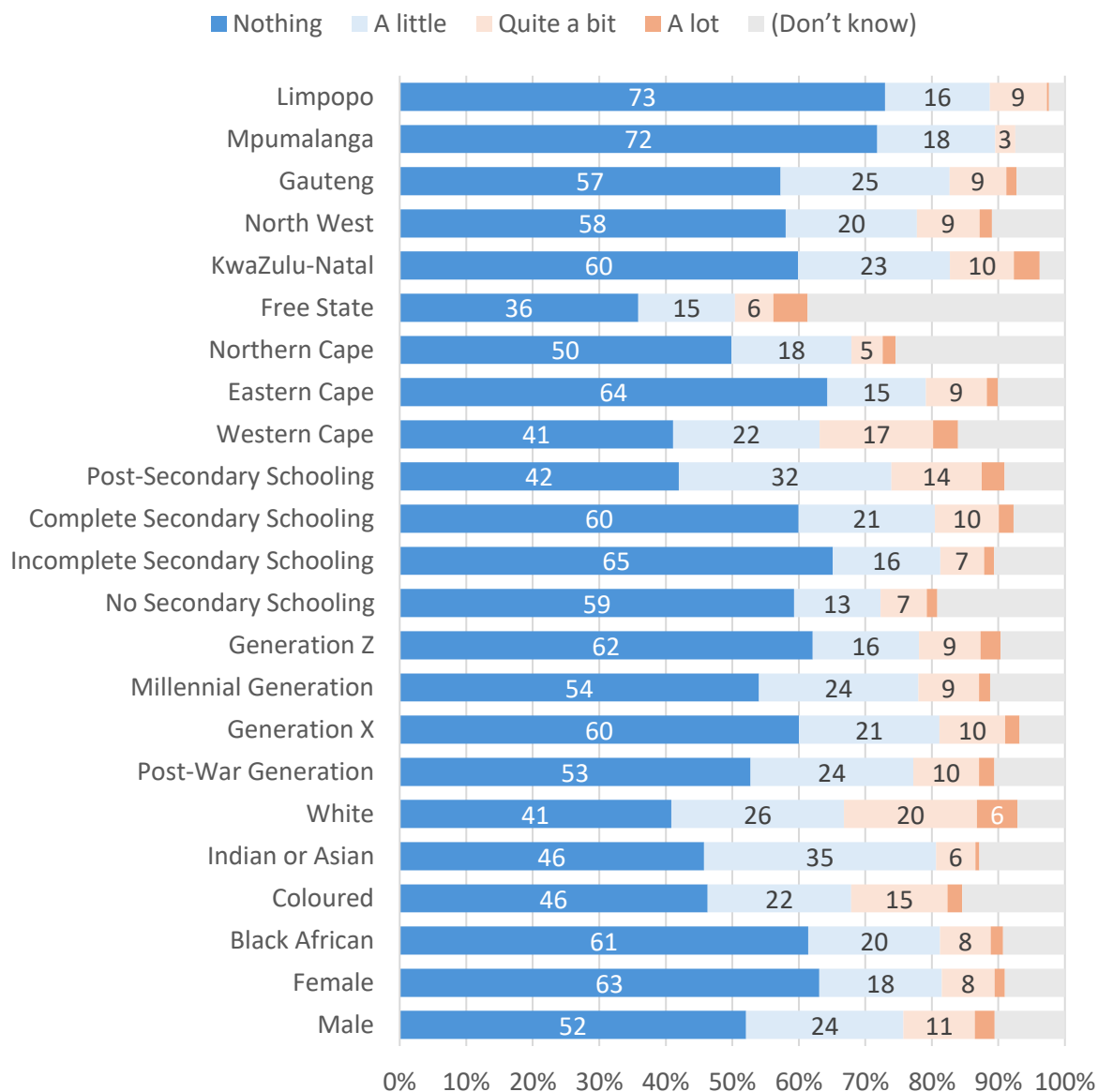


Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

In SASAS 2024, respondents were asked about their familiarity with the MPDF by indicating how much they had heard or read about it. Approximately three-fifths (58%) of the general public reported that they had never heard of the fund, while only about a fifth (21%) of adults said they had encountered a little information on it. An additional 9% mentioned that they had heard quite a bit, and a small minority (2%) claimed they had heard or read a lot about it. Moreover, around 10% of adults were so uninformed that they did not know how to answer. Overall, as we can discerned from **Figure 26**, these findings indicate that most of the public is largely unaware

of the MPDF, revealing a significant gap in engagement on this issue. To provide a clearer understanding of how MPDF awareness varies across different socio-demographic groups, a subgroup analysis was conducted; the results were presented in **Figure 27**.

Figure 27: Level of awareness of the Multi-Party Democracy Fund, by select socio-demographic attributes (row percentages)



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

There were, as expected, significant differences in MPDF awareness across educational levels. Individuals with higher education levels were more likely to be informed about the fund compared to those with lower education. For instance, only around a tenth of adults without a secondary school education reported having heard or read quite a bit (7%) or a lot (2%) about the MPDF. In contrast, approximately one-fifth of those with post-secondary qualifications indicated that they had heard or read quite a bit (14%) or a lot (3%) about the fund. Educational attainment status remained a statistically significant predictor of awareness even after

controlling for various socio-demographic factors such as gender, age, and population group.³⁰ A similar pattern emerged when comparing awareness by socio-economic status, with individuals in the high or upper-middle groups being more knowledgeable than their less affluent counterparts.

There was a discrete level of provincial variation in how people responded to the question about awareness of the MPDF. Levels of awareness were identified as especially low in Limpopo and Mpumalanga, nearly three-quarters of adults in those provinces said that they had never heard of the fund. Adults in the Western Cape, by contrast, tended to have somewhat higher levels of awareness than people in other provinces. Women exhibited lower levels of awareness of the MPDF compared to men. Around three-fifths (63%) of female adults reported knowing nothing about the fund—11 percentage points higher than their male counterparts. This gender gap in favour of males remained statistically significant even after accounting for socio-economic factors. Being female was found to reduce the likelihood of reporting awareness by 35%. While the data depicted in **Figure 27** shows some differences by age and population group, these were not statistically significant once other socio-demographic factors were controlled for.

If a person was aware of the PFA then they tended to be aware of the MPDF. Roughly speaking four-fifths of those who had never heard of the PFA had also never heard of the fund. Even after adjusting for various socio-demographic characteristics, greater awareness of the PFA was linked to an increased likelihood of being familiar with the MPDF. Specifically, each one-unit increase in the PFA awareness scale tripled the likelihood of being aware of the MPDF.³¹ This pattern of results seems to suggest that increased knowledge of political financing regulations is closely tied to greater awareness of the MPDF. People who participated in elections were found to be somewhat more likely to be aware of the MPDF. We found that nearly three-quarters (71%) of non-voters did not know about the MPDF, this figure is 16 percentage points lower than those who had voted before.

When compared to non-members, individuals who were affiliated with a political party demonstrated a higher likelihood of being aware of the MPDF (**Table 13**). There did not seem to be a sizeable difference here between inactive and active political party members. After controlling for socio-demographic factors, party membership was found to be associated with a 94% increase in the likelihood of being aware of the MPDF.³² There appeared to be little

³⁰ An ordered logistic regression was performed to investigate the factors that influence survey responses, excluding those who answered “don’t know.” The analysis, which included a sample of 2,770 respondents, accounted for age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The model yielded statistically significant results (Wald $\chi^2(17) = 105$, Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.046$), indicating that these variables together influenced the respondents’ answers.

³¹ An ordered logistic regression analysis was conducted to examine the factors influencing survey responses, excluding participants who selected “don’t know.” Using a sample of 2,642 respondents, the model controlled for age, gender, population group, education level, province, and socio-economic status. The results were statistically significant (Wald $\chi^2(18) = 231$, Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.187$), suggesting that these variables collectively shaped respondents’ answers.

³² An ordered logistic regression was used to explore the factors affecting survey responses, excluding those who chose “don’t know.” The analysis, conducted with a sample of 2,770 respondents, accounted

noticeable difference between non-members who backed a political party and those who did not. We found that having made a political donation before was positively associated with the MPDF. Persons who donated in the past were found to be more aware of the fund. Around a quarter of those who had donated before said that they knew either quite a bit (25%) or a lot (4%) about the MPDF. This figure is 19 percentage points higher than what was seen for those who had never donated. Generally, these findings indicate that both direct political participation (via donations) and party membership are strong predictors of increased awareness of the MPDF.

Table 13: Responses to the question: “How much have you heard or read about the Multi-Party Democracy Fund?”, by political party affiliation (column percentages)

	Active Members		Inactive Members		Non-Member, Supporter		Non-Member, Non-Supporter	
Nothing	50%	(4.607)	58%	(3.476)	61%	(2.361)	66%	(2.796)
A little	22%	(3.411)	31%	(3.615)	19%	(1.979)	17%	(2.197)
Quite a bit	13%	(2.326)	12%	(1.982)	8%	(1.179)	6%	(1.326)
A lot	3%	(1.354)	2%	(0.723)	2%	(0.719)	1%	(0.574)
(Do not know)	11%	(4.614)	7%	(1.488)	9%	(1.266)	10%	(1.410)
Total	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

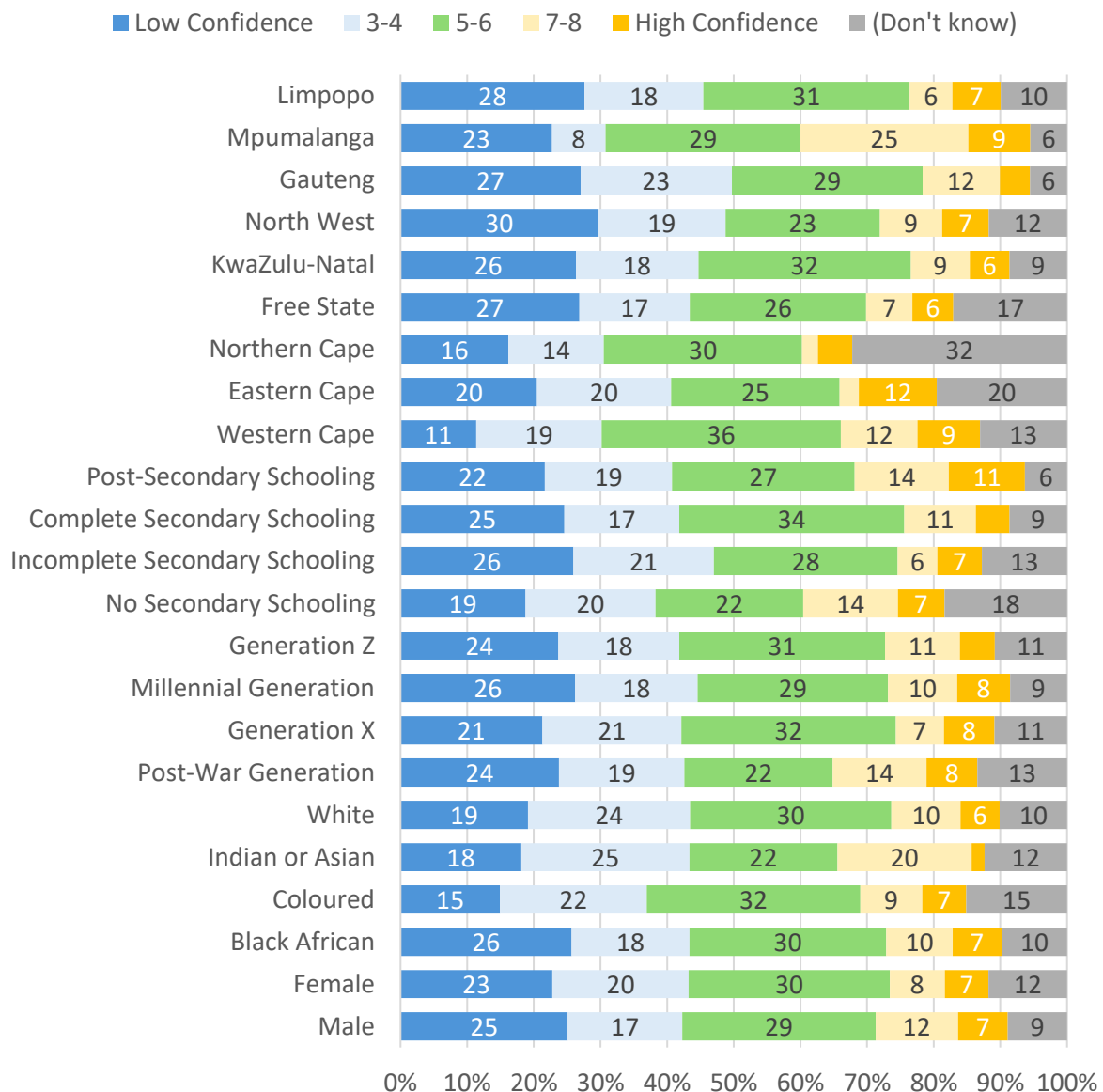
Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

4.4.2. Confidence in the Electoral Commission’s management of the MPDF

During the SASAS survey, respondents were asked how confident they were that the Electoral Commission manages the MPDF fairly and effectively. Participants were asked to answer on a 0-to-10 scale, with higher scores reflecting greater confidence. Notably, 24% of adults indicated low confidence by assigning a score of 2 or less, and 19% rated it between 3 and 4. The most common response was a mid-range score of 5 or 6, provided by 30% of the adult population. Few individuals expressed high confidence, with only 10% giving a score between 7 and 8 and 7% rating it 9 or 10. Additionally, 10% of the adult population were uncertain and responded with “don’t know.” Taken as a whole, these results indicate that a substantial portion of the mass public is not fully confident in the Commission’s ability to manage the MPDF effectively and fairly.

for age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The model showed statistically significant results (Wald $\chi^2(18) = 123$, Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.058$), indicating that these factors together influenced the participants' answers.

Figure 28: Perceived confidence in the Electoral Commission cohorts on managing the Multi-Party Democracy Fund (MPDF), by select socio-demographic attributes (row percentages)



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

Figure 28 displays confidence levels on the ability of the Electoral Commission to manage the MPDF across different socio-demographic groups. There was a gender differential in how people answered the confidence question. Male adults tended to have a somewhat higher confidence score than their female counterparts. But this gender bias did not remain statistically significant when we take a standard set of socio-demographic factors (e.g., educational attainment, age or province of residence) into account.³³ Noticeable provincial variations in how people rated their

³³ A linear ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was conducted to investigate the factors influencing survey responses, excluding those who chose “don't know.” The analysis, which included a sample of 2,688 participants, controlled for age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The model yielded statistically significant results ($F(17, 2670) = 3$, $\text{Prob} > F = 0.000$; $\text{Adj } R^2 = 0.042$), indicating that these factors collectively influenced the respondents' answers.

confidence in the ability of the Electoral Commission to manage the fund could be observed in the figure. Confidence was found to be especially low in Gauteng, half of the adults in that province gave the Commission a score of 4 or less. A similar result was observed in Limpopo. Levels of confidence that were well above the national average were found in Mpumalanga and the Western Cape. Significant differences in how people responded to the question were not observed by population group or age group.

Confidence in the Electoral Commission's ability to manage the MPDF was discovered to be strongly associated with both educational attainment and socio-economic status. There were notable variations in confidence levels across different educational backgrounds. Individuals with higher education were more likely to provide an answer and less likely to respond with "don't know." For example, 18% of those without secondary education chose "don't know," which is 8 percentage points above the national average. Moreover, more educated adults generally exhibited greater confidence in the Electoral Commission. A similar pattern emerged when comparing responses by socio-economic status; more affluent individuals tended to have a more positive view of the Commission's capabilities on this issue. We found that nearly a fifth (18%) of adults in the high socio-economic group gave the Commission a confidence score of 7 or above. This was 7 percentage points higher than what was observed for those in the low socio-economic group.

Table 14: Perceived confidence in the Electoral Commission cohorts on managing the Multi-Party Democracy Fund, by awareness of the Multi-Party Democracy Fund (column percentages)

	Nothing		A little		Quite a bit/ A lot		Uncertain	
Low Confidence	31%	(2.028)	15%	(2.081)	8%	(1.769)	20%	(7.951)
3-4	18%	(1.716)	22%	(2.898)	25%	(3.431)	9%	(2.328)
5-6	29%	(2.119)	33%	(3.000)	37%	(3.698)	15%	(3.286)
7-8	7%	(0.868)	18%	(3.457)	18%	(3.636)	3%	(1.603)
High Confidence	6%	(0.807)	10%	(2.723)	11%	(1.954)	4%	(1.494)
(Don't know)	9%	(1.001)	1%	(0.479)	0%	(0.202)	49%	(5.977)
Total	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

Table 14 showcases perceived confidence in the Electoral Commission's ability to manage the MPDF by awareness of the fund. The data presented shows that awareness of the MPDF was linked with confidence in the ability of the Electoral Commission to manage the fund. If a person was aware of the law, then they were more likely to have confidence in the Commission's ability to manage the fund. We found that more than a quarter (29%) of those who knew a quite a bit or a lot about the MPDF gave the Commission a confidence score of 7 or above. This figure was similar to those who knew a little but was 16 percentage points higher when compared to those who knew nothing. The observed linear correlation here could imply that those who are well-informed about the fund tend to have a better understanding of its purpose, structure, and the mechanisms in place to ensure accountability. This knowledge can foster trust in the Commission's ability to manage the MPDF effectively.

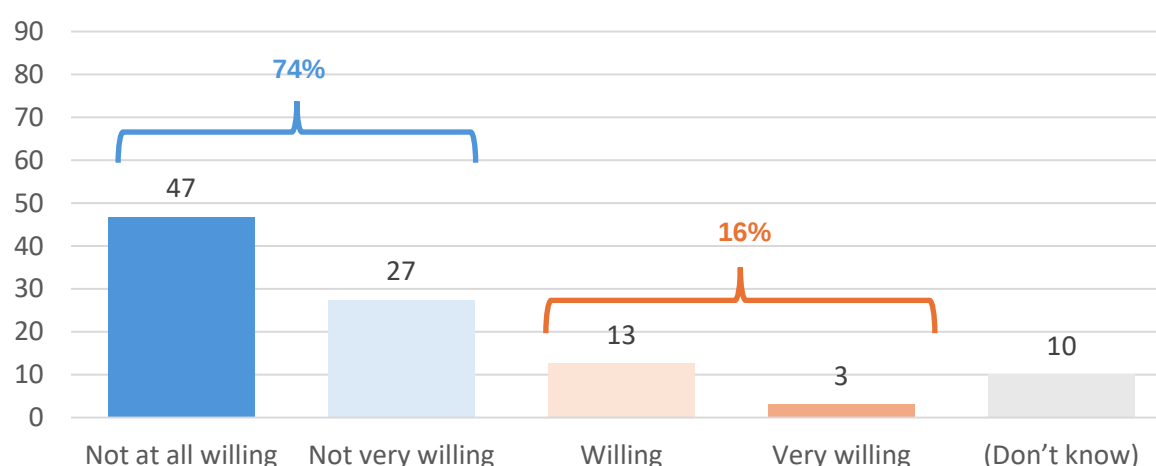
There is a strong (and positive) correlation between confidence in the Electoral Commission's ability to manage the MPDF and the perceived capability of the Commission to collect funding

source information. In other words, adults who were highly confident in the Commission’s data collection skills were also more likely to rate its overall management of the MPDF favourably. For instance, nearly two-thirds (66%) of those who expressed high confidence in its data collection abilities gave the Commission a score of 7 or above on the management confidence scale. This was 57 percentage points higher than the national average and 64 percentage points above those with low confidence in its data collection. Essentially, most people seem to apply the same overall trust in the Commission’s competence in administering the PFA to other aspects. This broad trust in its technical capabilities, in turn, bolsters confidence in its regulatory functions and effective management of the MPDF.

4.4.3. Willingness to donate to the MPDF

Scrutinising public opinion on the willingness to donate to the MPDF is essential for understanding citizens’ engagement in the political financing process and gauging their trust in political institutions. This subsection provides insight into whether the public is inclined to contribute financially to initiatives that aim to enhance transparency and accountability in politics, reflecting their commitment to strengthening democratic processes. It also helps identify potential barriers to civic participation, such as financial constraints or distrust in how funds are managed. Moreover, investigating responses across different socio-demographic groups can reveal disparities in political engagement and inform targeted outreach efforts. The data presented here can help policymakers understand why the MPDF does not have broader public support.

Figure 29: Public responses to the question: “How willing would you be to donate to the Multi-Party Democracy Fund?” (%)

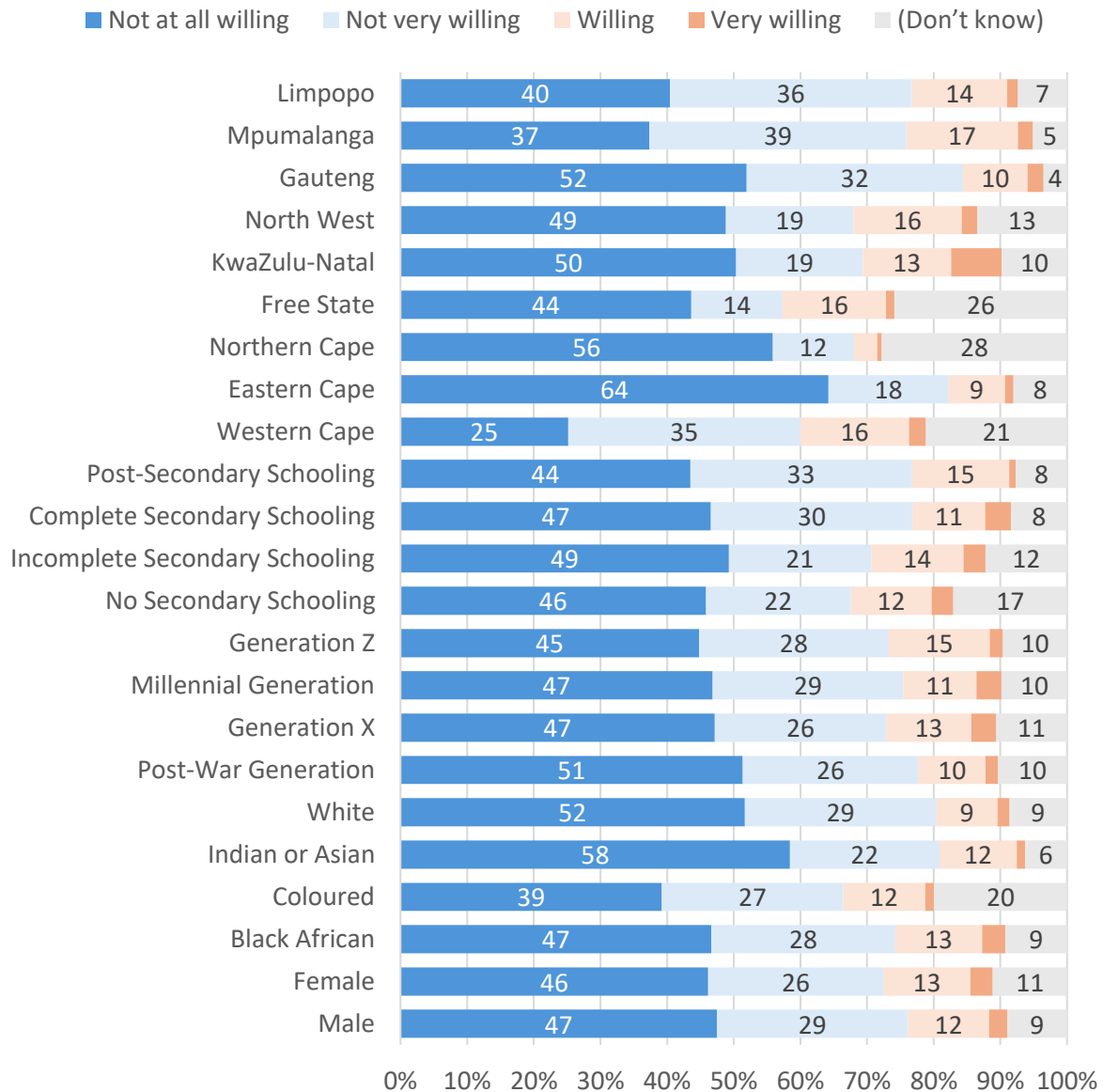


Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

In SASAS 2024, respondents were asked how willing they would be to donate to the MPDF. Overall, these findings indicate that most of the public is largely reluctant to donate to the fund, revealing a significant level of public aversion on this issue (**Figure 29**). Around three-quarters of the general public said that they would be not at all (47%) or not very (27%) willing to donate. Only a small segment of all adults stated that they were hypothetically willing (13%) or very (3%) willing. Additionally, roughly 10% of adults were so uninformed that they were unable to give an answer. To provide a clearer understanding of how MPDF awareness varies across different

socio-demographic groups a subgroup analysis was computed, with the results presented in **Figure 30**.

Figure 30: Levels of unwillingness and willingness to donate to the Multi-Party Democracy Fund across socio-demographic subgroups (row percentages)



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

There were significant differences among population groups regarding their willingness to donate to the MPDF. On average, adults from the white and Indian groups were more reluctant to contribute to the fund than those from other groups. For instance, a clear majority of Indian adults indicated that they were either not willing at all (58%) or not very willing (22%) to donate. There were significant differences in opinions on this issue among residents of various provinces. The provincial populations who were the most unwilling to donate to the fund hypothetically were Gauteng and the Eastern Cape. When judged against other provinces, willingness to donate was found to be highest in the Western Cape and the Free State. There were distinct age group

differences in how people responded to the question about willingness to donate to the MPDF. Members of younger generations demonstrated a lower level of unwillingness to donate when compared with their older counterparts. Consider, for example, that 45% of Generation Z said that they were not at all willing to donate. This figure is 11 percentage points below the Post-War Generation.

Adults who had never voted were found to be somewhat less likely to express an interest in donating to the fund than those who had voted. The lion's share of non-voters said that they were not all (49%) or not very (31%) willing to donate to the MPDF. This figure is 9 percentage points lower than irregular voters and 7 percentage points lower than regular voters. People who had donated to a political party or independent candidate before were found to be more willing to donate to the MPDF. Consider, for example, that roughly a quarter of past donors said that they would be willing (26%) or very willing (2%) to donate to the fund. This figure is 12 percentage points higher than the national average. Amongst non-participants there was a distinct difference between those who showed an intention to donate in the future and those who had no such intention. A relatively large proportion of those non-participants with an intention said that they would be either willing (39%) or very willing (11%) to donate. These results suggest that both past donation behaviour and future donation intentions are important predictors of willingness to contribute to the MPDF.

Table 15: Responses to the question: "How willing would you be to donate to the Multi-Party Democracy Fund?", by political party affiliation (column percentages)

	Active Members		Inactive Members		Non-Member, Supporter		Non-Member, Non-Supporter	
Not at all willing	47%	(4.609)	44%	(3.518)	44%	(3.183)	52%	(3.183)
Not very willing	22%	(4.538)	35%	(3.295)	27%	(2.935)	28%	(2.935)
Willing	17%	(2.919)	12%	(2.107)	15%	(1.731)	7%	(2.188)
Very willing	3%	(1.213)	3%	(1.469)	4%	(1.056)	1%	(0.502)
(Don't know)	11%	(1.955)	6%	(1.256)	10%	(1.364)	11%	(0.771)
Total	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

There was an association between public willingness to donate to the MPDF and political party membership (**Table 15**). Active party members were, on average, more willing to donate than non-members who supported a political party or inactive political party members. But the size of the differential here was relatively small. What was a better predictor of willingness to donate was whether a person supported a political party or not. If a person did not support any political party, then they were much less likely to indicate a willingness to donate. After controlling for socio-demographic factors, being a supporter of a political party was associated with a 33% higher likelihood of reporting a willingness to donate³⁴. There was an association between being

³⁴ An ordered logistic regression was conducted to explore the factors influencing survey responses, excluding those who chose "don't know." The analysis, using a sample of 2,759 participants, controlled for variables such as age, gender, population group, education level, province, and socio-economic status. The model produced statistically significant results (Wald $\chi^2(18) = 92$, Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.026$), indicating that these factors together influenced the respondents' answers.

aware of the MPDF and willingness to donate to the fund. Even if socio-demographic factors were taken into account, people who were aware were found to be, on average, more likely to display a willingness to donate. Data analysis showed that for a one unit increase on the awareness scale, the likelihood of stating a willingness to donate to the fund increased by 71%.

There is a positive association between confidence in the Commission's ability to manage the MPDF and willingness to donate to the fund. In other words, people who were highly confident in the Commission's management skills were also more likely to want to donate to the MPDF. But the strength of this correlation was not as strong as may have been expected. We found that about a third (34%) of those who were willing to donate gave the Commission a score of 7 or above. This figure was only 15 percentage points above those who said that they were not at all unwilling to donate. After controlling for a range of socio-demographic factors, confidence in the management abilities of the Commission only increased the odds of expressing a willingness to donate by a relatively small margin.³⁵ We discovered that a one-unit increase on the confidence scale was associated with a 8% higher likelihood of stating a willingness to donate.

4.4.4. The voices of the people: Reasons for MPDF donation intentions

As part of the SASAS questionnaire, survey participants were asked to indicate why they would or would not donate to the MPDF. Most people provided a valid answer to this question and only a small minority (12%) did not answer it. Based on the survey responses, several key reasons were identified to explain why many people would not donate to the MPDF. A predominant factor appears to be a lack of awareness about the fund itself. Many respondents expressed that they simply did not know about the MPDF. One respondent from a village in the Kalahari Desert remarked "I've never heard of it" while another respondent from Danielskuil in the North West said that "I have never heard of this before". These responses underscore the need for improved outreach and public education. Without a clear understanding of the fund's purpose and function, people will not want to donate to it.

Disillusionment with the overall political process also emerged as a critical theme. Many respondents conveyed a sense of political cynicism, feeling that all politics was immoral. A respondent from a rural village near Empangeni said that "I don't trust the government and the politicians they are immoral corrupt and selfish" while a respondent from the Khuma township in Matlosana expressed the view that "politician people are thieves, and I don't trust them". A resident from Mabopane township north of Pretoria disclosed that they don't like politics and thought that politicians were corrupt. A person from central Pretoria also stated that there were too many criminals in politics while a respondent from southern rural KwaZulu-Natal said that "I don't trust anything that has to do with the government". These sentiments reflect a broader lack of confidence in the democratic process where politicians are seen as fundamentally dishonest.

³⁵ An ordered logistic regression was performed to identify the factors influencing survey responses, excluding those who selected "don't know." The analysis, conducted with a sample of 2,540 participants, adjusted for age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The model yielded statistically significant results (Wald $\chi^2(18) = 79$, Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.025$), indicating that these variables collectively influenced the respondents' answers.

Another major reason put forward by respondents is a deep-seated distrust regarding how the MPDF was managed. Several participants noted scepticism about the transparency and accountability of the fund. A resident from rural southern KwaZulu-Natal, for example, said "I don't trust that those who would manage the fund will not misuse the money". An individual from a northern suburb in Durban stated that they did not think that the people who would manage the money will be trustworthy. A resident from Gompo township in East London stated that "they will misuse the donation". Someone from Boksburg believed that the fund managers would exploit people and asked why they would donate if they knew that the fund managers would not be using the money honestly. This level of concern suggests that fears of corruption or mismanagement are significant barriers, discouraging individuals from participating in a system they perceive as flawed or easily manipulated.

Some respondents believed that they were not wealthy enough to donate to the MPDF. A resident from Grassy Park in Cape Town maintained that they do not have money to waste and that political parties need to have or raise their own cash. The respondent said that they had to work to sustain themselves and their family and politicians need to do the same. Someone from Germiston stated clearly that "I don't have money to feed politicians". An inhabitant of Nellmapius township in Pretoria indicated that, as a pensioner, the little money that she possessed was used to support the family. They did not have enough to donate to the MPDF. A respondent from Mdantsane township near East London said that he was poor and that he was the one who needed a donation. These responses show that some feel incapable of contributing, their financial situation leaves them feeling disempowered.

The open-ended responses reveal several key themes that explain why people are willing to donate to the MPDF. A major motivation is a commitment to strengthening democracy. One respondent from East London stated, "Yes I want to be a part of the democracy"; this answer reflects a sense of civic duty. Another resident from the Clermont township in Durban echoed this by saying, "so all parties can share in the country's democracy without unfair advantages". These comments indicate that many view the MPDF as a means of promoting transparency and accountability in politics. Another recurring theme is the desire to uplift the downtrodden. One participant from Klerksdorp in the North West said that it will help the poor. This sentiment was reinforced by a resident from the Soweto township in Johannesburg who said that "the money we donate will be helpful for those who are poor". These responses suggest that some see the fund playing a positive role in society.

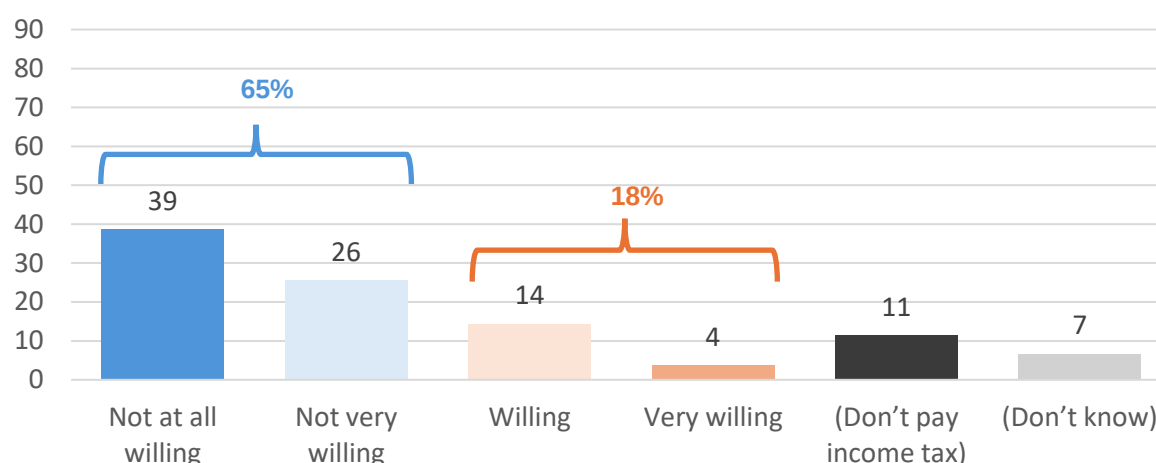
Some respondents viewed the MPDF as an investment in the political future of the women in the country. A respondent from a rural village in the Drakensberg mountains said that it will improve black women empowerment. A resident from Huhudi township in Vryburg told fieldworkers that the fund would support female political representatives while a resident from Barkly West on the Vaal River said that the MPDF would help put more females on party lists. Such responses illustrate a forward-looking perspective amongst some, viewing the MPDF as building long-term political empowerment for women. Furthermore, a number of responses indicated that donating to the fund enhances change in the country. One person from Bedfordview suburb in Johannesburg said that they would donate because they wanted to see change. Another respondent from Emzinoni township in Bethal said that "we want change in our country and change needs money".

In summation, an analysis of the open-ended responses highlights a divided landscape of opinions on the MPDF. The findings reveal a significant degree of political pessimism and a general distrust in the status quo. Most do not see donating to the MPDF as driving long-term political and social change. Many people are also reluctant to support or donate to the fund due to factors such as a lack of awareness and financial constraints. On the other hand, it was possible to identify those who had a positive view of the fund. People who considered donating to the MPDF talked about a sense of civic duty, a desire to strengthen democracy through increased transparency and accountability. There was also a sense amongst some that the MPDF was committed to uplifting the underprivileged and a belief that the fund could empower marginalised groups (especially women).

4.4.5. Will tax rebates fail to boost willingness to donate?

In SASAS 2024, respondents were asked whether they would be more or less willing to donate to the MPDF if they received a tax rebate. Approximately two-thirds of the public indicated reluctance, with 39% saying they would not be willing at all and 26% stating they would not be very willing (**Figure 31**). In contrast, only a small portion of the adult public expressed potential interest, with 14% being hypothetically willing and 4% being very willing. The remainder of the adult population either answered 'don't know' (7%) or indicated that they could not answer the question because they personally did not pay income tax (11%). It would appear that financial incentives alone may not be enough to change public attitudes towards the MPDF, and other factors may play a more influential role in shaping willingness to contribute.

Figure 31: Public responses to the question: "Would you be more or less willing to donate to the Multi-Party Democracy Fund if you received some money back on the taxes you pay (i.e., tax rebate)?"

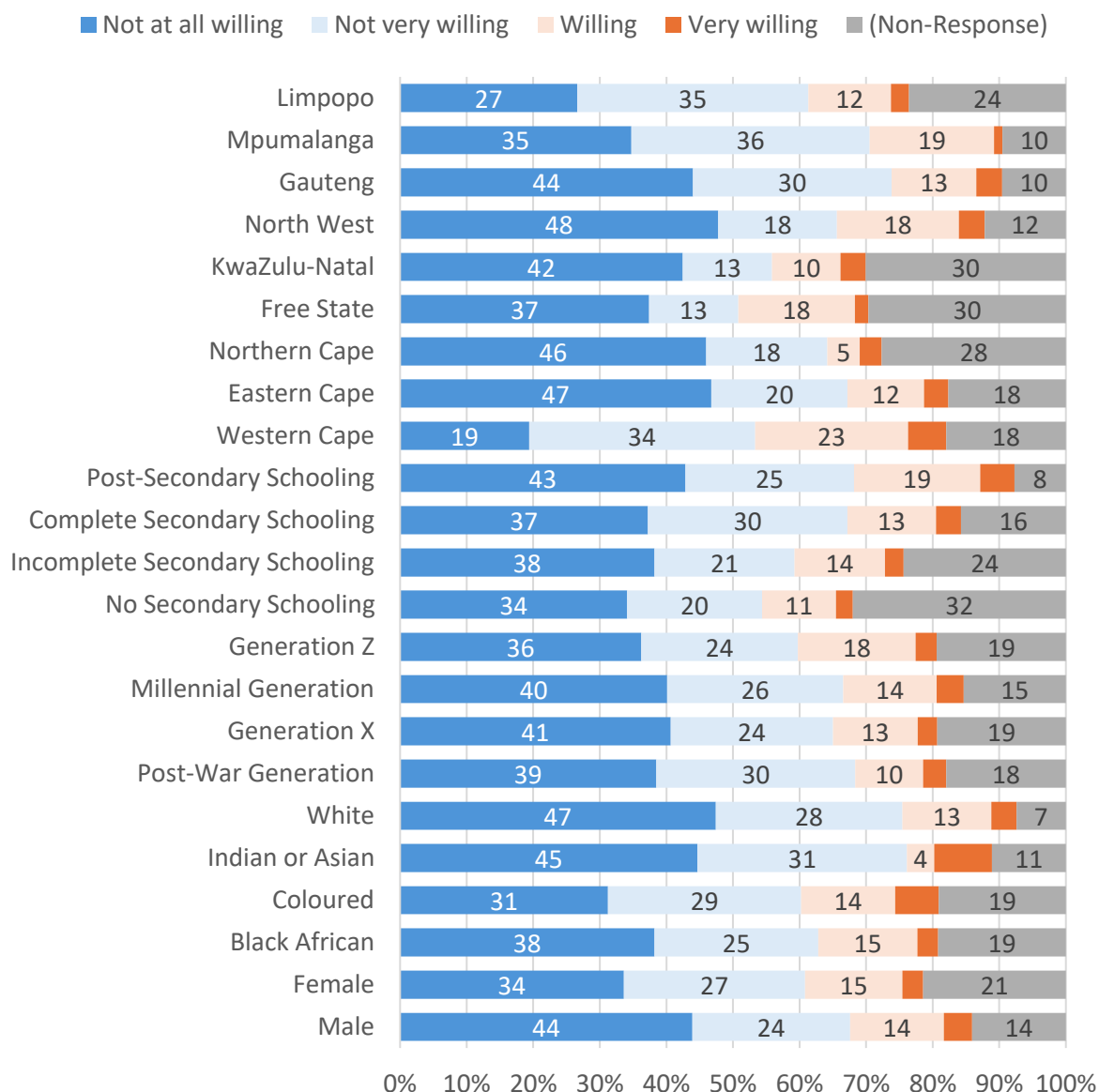


Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

Empirical evidence reveals that the prospect of a tax rebate has little influence on changing public attitudes toward donating to the MPDF. If a person said that they would be unwilling to donate to the MPDF then they were more likely to give a negative answer to the rebate question, stating that they would be unwilling to donate if a rebate was offered. Of those who would not be willing to donate to the MPDF, only 8% said that they would be willing to change their mind

if a tax rebate was proposed.³⁶ A tax rebate did not have a large impact on those who replied 'don't know' when asked if they would donate to the MPDF. Only a tenth, roughly speaking, of this group said that they would be willing (8%) or very willing (2%) to donate to the fund if a rebate was presented as an incentive. These findings confirm that financial incentives alone are unlikely to substantially change public opinion on this issue.

Figure 32: Levels of unwillingness and willingness to donate if tax relief is provided, by socio-demographic subgroups (row percentages)



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

³⁶ Looking at it more closely, it would appear that those who were the most willingness to donate to the MPDF were the least likely to be swayed by an offer of a tax rebate. Only a twentieth of adults who said that they were not at all willing to donate would change their minds if a tax rebate was offered. By contrast, roughly an eighth (12%) of those who not very willing to donate to the MPDF would donate if a tax rebate was provided.

As can be observed in **Figure 32**, there were noteworthy variations in the levels of willingness to donate if a tax rebate was provided across different educational attainment groups. Those who were better educated were discovered to be less willing to donate if a tax rebate was offer then those who were less educated. Consider, for example, that roughly three-fifths of those with a post-secondary educational qualification said that they would be not at all (43%) or not very (25%) willing to donate if a tax rebate was obtainable. This was 14 percentage points higher than those without a secondary education. Data analysis shows that this disparity was a product of the fact that non-response on this question is lower amongst the better educated than less educated. A regression analysis revealed that, after controlling for other socio-demographic factors, being educated decreased the odds of giving a non-response but did *not* increase the odds of expressing a willingness to donate to the MPDF if a rebate was offered³⁷.

Significant provincial differences emerged in responses to the tax rebate question. Adults in the Western Cape were the most likely to donate to the MPDF if a tax rebate was provided while Gauteng and Mpumalanga residents were the least. Data analysis demonstrated that this was not simply due to higher levels of non-response in some provinces rather than others. A multivariate analysis found that, even taking non-response and other socio-demographic factors into account, living in the Western Cape almost doubled the odds of expressing willingness to donate. Living in Gauteng and Mpumalanga, by contrast, reduced the odds of wanting to donate by 36% and 50% respectively. Additionally, there were clear differences across population groups. On average, white and Indian adults were more opposed to donating to the MPDF under a hypothetical tax relief scheme; nearly three-quarters of these adults expressed reluctance. Further data analysis showed that this could be attributed to higher non-response amongst the black African and coloured populations.

There were distinct generational differences in how people responded to the tax rebate question. Younger generations responded more positively to the question, indicating a willingness to donate if a rebate was offered. However, the data analysis revealed that the observed difference was not merely a result of higher non-response rates within this group. Multivariate analysis demonstrated that, after controlling for non-response and other socio-demographic variables, belonging to Generation Z was associated with an 85% greater likelihood of expressing a willingness to donate. We found a moderate gender differential in how people answered the tax rebate question. Female adults were discovered to respond more positively to the offer of a rebate than their male peers. But this was due to the fact that there was much higher levels of non-response amongst women than men.

³⁷ A multinomial logistic regression analysis was conducted to explore the factors affecting survey responses, permitting the inclusion of respondents who opted for a non-response option. The base outcome was 'not willing to donate if a tax rebate was offered'. The analysis, which included 3,090 participants, accounted for age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The model produced statistically significant results (Wald $\chi^2(34) = 146$, Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.061$), indicating that these factors collectively influenced the respondents' answers.

Table 16: Responses to the question: "Would you be more or less willing to donate to the Multi-Party Democracy Fund if you received some money back on the taxes you pay (i.e., tax rebate)" by political party affiliation (column percentages)

	Active Members		Inactive Members		Non-Member, Supporter		Non-Member, Non-Supporter	
Not at all willing	37%	(4.690)	45%	(3.538)	33%	(2.250)	42%	(3.151)
Not very willing	22%	(3.700)	32%	(3.191)	24%	(2.211)	26%	(2.710)
Willing	18%	(2.785)	11%	(2.066)	18%	(1.950)	10%	(2.620)
Very willing	5%	(1.248)	4%	(1.048)	4%	(1.042)	2%	(0.810)
(Non-Response)	19%	(3.804)	8%	(1.791)	21%	(1.919)	20%	(2.103)
Total	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

Table 16 depicts the level of willingness to donate to the MPDF if a rebate was offered by political party affiliation. Active political party membership was found to be associated with greater willingness to donate to the MPDF if a tax rebate is offered. If a person was an active member of a political party, then they were more likely to respond positively to the tax rebate question. Nearly a quarter of active members said that they were either willing (18%) or very willing (5%) to donate if a rebate was accessible. This figure was notably higher than those who were inactive party members. Interestingly, we that supporters who were non-members were more willing to donate than non-supporters. Only a small proportion of non-supporters expressed willingness to donate to the MPDF if a rebate were offered, with just 10% indicating they were willing and 1% very willing. This figure is 13 percentage points higher than what was observed for supporters who were non-members.

Individuals who had previously donated to a political party or independent candidate were more inclined to respond favourably to the tax rebate question. More than two-fifths of past donors said that were either willing (31%) or very willing (10%) to donate to the MPDF if a rebate was obtainable. Multivariate analysis showed that, even after accounting for non-response and various socio-demographic factors, individuals who had previously donated were three times as likely to express willingness to contribute to the MPDF if tax relief was provided³⁸. Amongst non-participants, interestingly enough, intention to donate in the future was found to be correlated with willingness to donate if a rebate was offered. More than half of this group said that they would be either willing (41%) or very willing (11%) to donate if a rebate was accessible. Data analysis showed that, controlling for other factors, intention to donate to a political party almost doubled the likelihood of a person responding favourably to tax relief.

³⁸ A multinomial logistic regression was performed to investigate the factors influencing survey responses, allowing the inclusion of participants who selected a non-response option. The reference category was 'not willing to donate if a tax rebate was offered.' The analysis included 2,946 respondents and controlled for variables such as age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The model yielded statistically significant results (Wald $\chi^2(42) = 357$, Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.192$), demonstrating that these factors together had a meaningful impact on the participants' responses.

4.5. Changes to the political financial regulatory framework

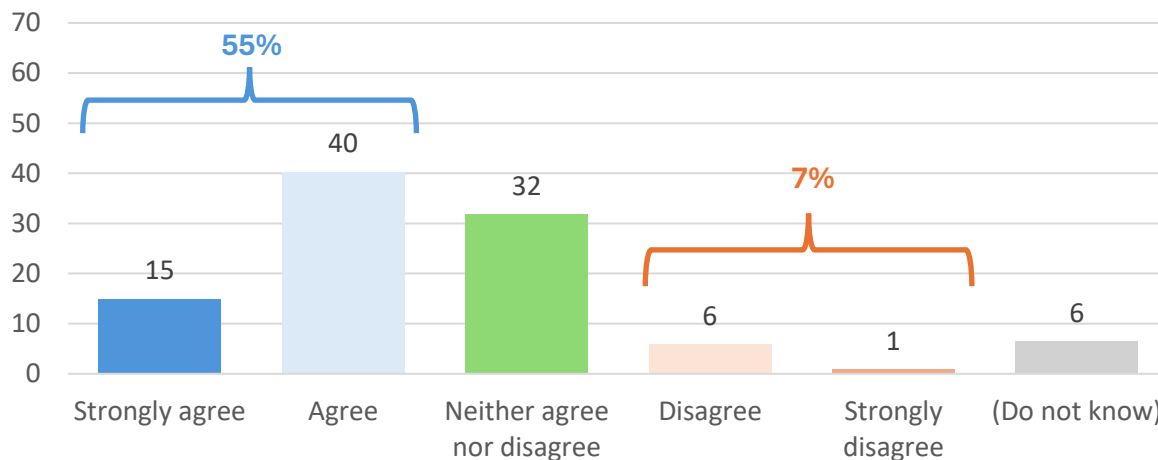
The previous sections have shown there is a significant level of public concern about how political parties in South Africa are financed. Understanding attitudes toward finance regulations reforms can help policymakers identify ways to improve the situation. Exploring public opinion on reforming existing finance regulations is valuable, it helps provide useful insights into what regulatory changes are likely to be accepted by the mass public. Ignoring public opinion can lead to poorly designed reforms that are difficult to implement or enforce. In this section we first look at whether people think that tracking the expenditures of a political party or an independent candidate is an effective way to verify the accuracy of its reported donations. This approach may be more effective than the current one which is to track donations received by a political party or an independent candidate. Then we consider whether adults would support political parties receiving public funds to promote and support female representatives.

4.5.1. Support for monitoring party spending to ensure donation transparency

Tracking a political party's expenditures can be an effective way to verify the accuracy of its reported donations. Some of the advantages of this approach include providing insight into how parties are using funds, revealing discrepancies if spending exceeds reported donations and helping identify potential unreported income sources. But this approach is not necessarily more effective than examining the donations received. Tracking donations also has its advantages, it allows direct verification of reported income and is easier to cross-reference with donor records. Understanding public preferences for data collection methods can help policymakers choose the most effective and acceptable approaches. Studying public opinion can identify specific concerns about data collection that can then be addressed through policy design and public communication.

SASAS respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that tracking a political party's expenditures is an effective way to verify the accuracy of its reported donations. More than half of the mass public supported this idea, 40% agreed and 15% strongly agreed (**Figure 33**). A small minority expressed disagreement, with 6% disagreeing and 1% strongly disagreeing. Many were neutral on this issue, 32% of the adult public neither agreed nor disagreed while 6% of the adult public were unsure how to answer. Overall, the findings suggest a general belief that monitoring political party spending can serve as a useful tool for ensuring transparency in reported donations. To provide a clearer understanding of how agreement with this statement about expenditure tracking varies across different groups in the country, we conducted a subgroup analysis.

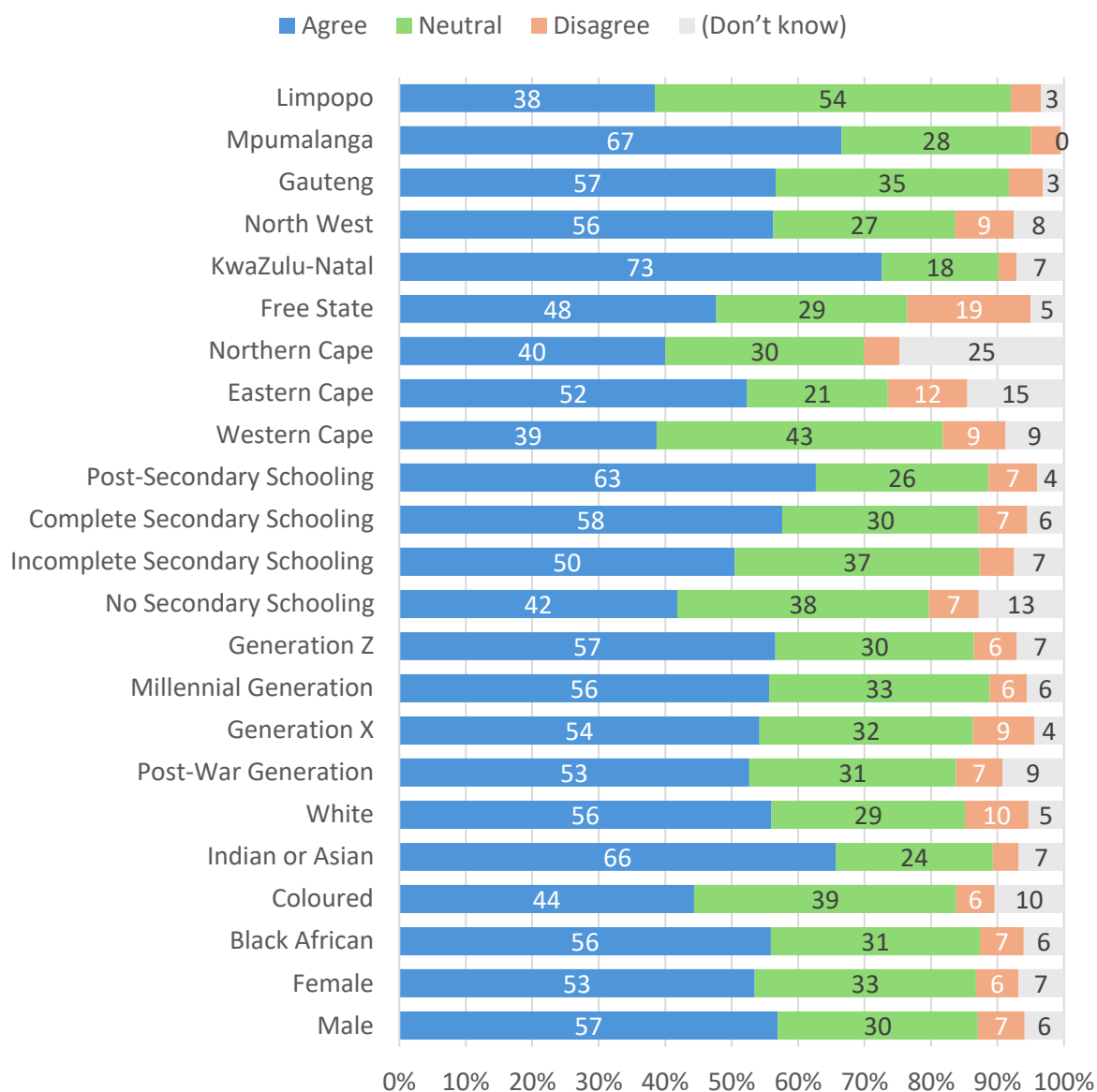
Figure 33: Public agreement and disagreement with the statement: “monitoring how much a political party is spending is a good way to check how accurately it is reporting the donations it has received”



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

We found a degree of subgroup variation in how people responded to the statement about whether tracking a party's spending is a good way to verify the accuracy of its reported donations. But, on average, most socio-demographic groups did not disagree with the statement on tracking political party's expenditures. The subgroup analysis in **Figure 34** showed minor variation among population groups, with coloured adults being less likely, on average, to believe that monitoring a party's spending ensures accurate reporting of donations. However, after accounting for other socio-demographic factors, this difference is not statistically significant. There were discernible differences by province of residence in the level of agreement with the statement. Agreement with the statement was found to be most robust in KwaZulu-Natal where three-quarters of the provincial population either just agreed (49%) or strongly agreed (24%). The weakest level of agreement was amongst adult populations the Northern Cape, Limpopo and the Western Cape. Low levels of agreement in these provinces was not due to high disagreement; it was instead a result of a greater share of neutral responses to the question.

Figure 34: Levels of agreement and disagreement with the statement about whether monitoring political expenditure is the best way to keep track of donations, by select socio-demographic subgroups (row percentages)



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

There were, as may be expected, noteworthy variations in the levels of agreement with the financial monitoring statement by socio-economic status group. Those in the higher socio-economic status groups were found to be somewhat more likely to agree with the statement than those who were in the lower status groups. Consider, for example, that nearly a quarter (23%) of those in the high status group strongly agreed with the statement. This level of agreement was 8 percentage points higher than the national average and 12 percentage points higher than what was observed for the lowest socio-economic group. A comparable pattern emerged when examining agreement levels amongst the different educational attainment groups. Better educated individuals were more likely to express agreement with the statement than those with lower levels of education. Consider, for example, that almost two-thirds (63%) of

those with post-secondary education agreed with the statement while only about two-fifths (42%) of those with no secondary education did the same.

Table 17: Levels of agreement and disagreement with the statement about whether monitoring political expenditure is the best way to keep track of donations, by election participation (column percentages)

	Regular voter		Irregular Voter		Never Voted	
Strongly agree	16%	(1.679)	18%	(2.456)	8%	(1.733)
Agree	45%	(2.111)	32%	(2.716)	41%	(4.423)
Neutral	28%	(1.841)	36%	(3.145)	36%	(4.465)
Disagree	5%	(0.696)	7%	(1.181)	8%	(1.783)
Strongly disagree	1%	(0.280)	1%	(0.291)	1%	(0.423)
(Do not know)	6%	(0.9258)	6%	(0.982)	7%	(1.508)
Total	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

Adults who consistently participated in national elections were more inclined to believe that monitoring a political party's spending is an effective way to verify the accuracy of its reported donations (**Table 17**). Even after accounting for various socio-demographic factors, being an irregular voter decreased the likelihood of agreeing with the statement by 43%³⁹. Having never voted, once other factors were taken into account, reduced the chance of agreeing by 46%. This pattern of results indicates that individuals who do not participate in elections regularly may have lower confidence in financial oversight mechanisms. Those who had previously donated to political parties and independent candidates were found to be less likely to believe that tracking a political party's spending helps verify the accuracy of its reported donations. Among non-participants, an interesting pattern emerged—those who said that they would donate in the future were more likely to agree with the statement. Among those who intended to donate, 68% agreed, a higher proportion than among non-participants with no intention to donate (54%) or past donors (45%). Those considering future donations, on the whole, seem to be more likely to support stricter financial monitoring.

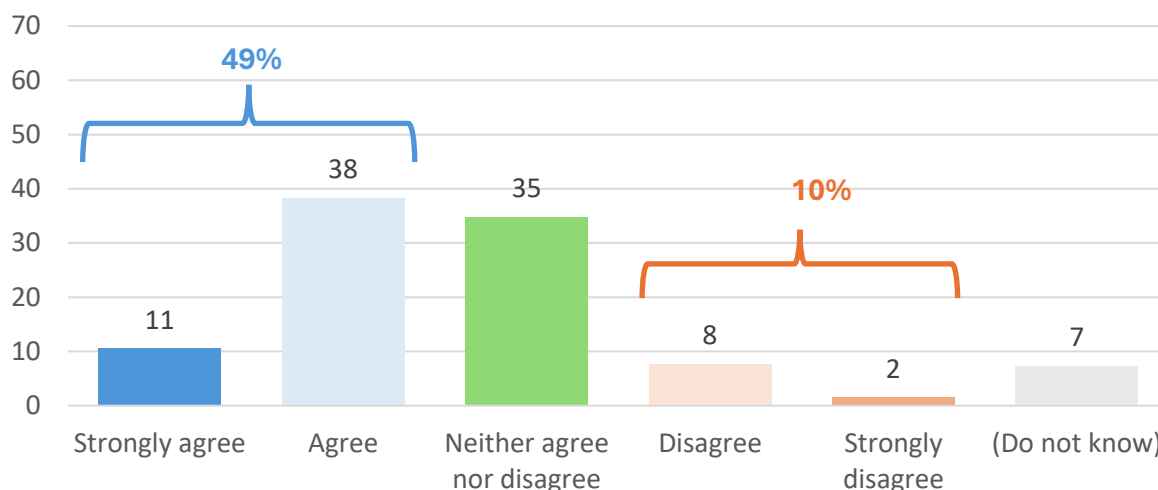
4.5.2. Promoting female political representatives

Investigating public preferences for political parties receiving public funds should promote and support female representatives is important because it provides insights into societal attitudes toward gender equality in political institutions. In South Africa—a country with a disgraceful history of gender exclusion—this question reveals whether citizens believe that public money should be used as leverage to increase female representation in politics. Such data can inform policymakers about the level of public support for gender-sensitive conditions on political funding, which in turn could help shape reforms that promote more balanced and

³⁹ A multinomial logistic regression was performed to examine the factors influencing survey responses, including participants who selected “don’t know.” The reference category for the analysis was ‘disagreed.’ The model involved 3,067 respondents and controlled for variables such as age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The model yielded statistically significant results (Wald $\chi^2(57) = 340$, Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.076$), demonstrating that these variables together had a significant effect on the participants’ responses.

representative governance. Moreover, understanding these opinions across different socio-demographic groups helps identify areas where further public education or advocacy may be needed.

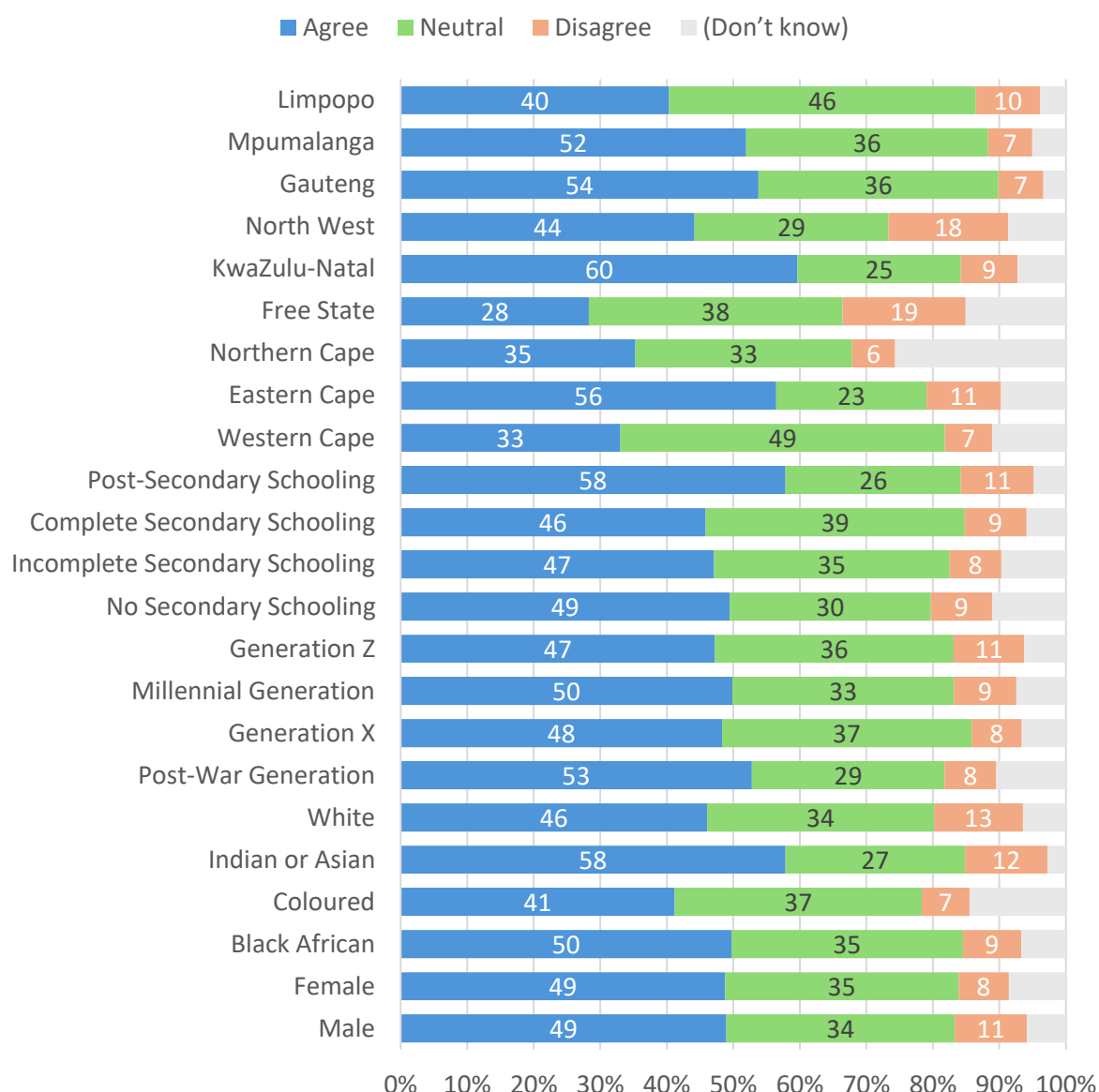
Figure 35: Public agreement and disagreement with the statement: “one of the conditions of a political party receiving public money should be that it promotes and supports female representatives (e.g., on its party lists and in leadership roles)” (%)



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

SASAS respondents were queried on whether they agreed or disagreed that a condition for a political party to receive public funds should be its commitment to promoting and supporting female representatives (for example, on party lists and in leadership roles). On the whole, as can be seen in **Figure 35**, the empirical evidence reveals that the majority of adults hold a positive or neutral view on using public money to enhance female representation in politics. Approximately half of the general public expressed support for this condition, with 38% agreeing and 11% strongly agreeing. Only a small proportion of the adult public disagreed, with 8% disagreeing and 2% strongly disagreeing. A large minority (35%) remained neutral while 7% of the mass public indicated that they were unsure how to answer. To provide clearer insight into how agreement with the statement varies among different socio-demographic groups, a subgroup analysis was produced.

Figure 36: Levels of agreement and disagreement with the statement about the use of public money to support female political participation across select subgroups (row percentages)



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

The subgroup analysis shows that women were more likely than men to endorse the idea that one of the conditions for a political party receiving public funds should be its promotion and support of female representatives. However, as **Figure 36** illustrates, the gender difference is relatively modest; only about a tenth of men (11%) disagreed with the statement. When controlling for various socio-demographic factors, being female did not increase the odds of agreeing with the statement.⁴⁰ Additionally, the analysis uncovered significant differences

⁴⁰ An ordered logistic regression analysis was conducted to examine the factors influencing survey responses, excluding participants who selected “don’t know.” The analysis, based on a sample of 2,822 individuals, controlled for age, gender, population group, education level, province, and socio-economic status. The model produced statistically significant results (Wald $\chi^2(17) = 83$, Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.027$), suggesting that these factors collectively shaped respondents’ answers.

among population groups. Coloured adults were, on average, more inclined to disagree with the statement. This population group bias remained statistically significant even after adjusting for factors like education, age, and province of residence. When compared to rural residents, urban dwellers were less likely to agree with the statement (55% versus 46%). Being an urban resident increased the chance of agreeing with the statement by 96% once other factors (e.g., gender and age) were controlled for.

We did not find large generational differences in whether people agreed or disagreed with the statement about using public money to support greater gender equality in politics. But we did discover that adults in Generation Z were somewhat less likely to agree with the statement than their older counterparts. There were significant provincial variations in agreement with the statement. Adult residents in the Western Cape, the Northern Cape and the Free State displayed the lowest levels of agreement. Of the nine provinces, on the other hand, residents in KwaZulu-Natal displayed the highest level of agreement. People who were more educated were found to be somewhat more supportive of the proposition under discussion. We found that almost three-fifths of the post-secondary educated either agreed (48%) or strongly agreed (10%) with the statement. This is 9 percentage points above the national average.

Table 18: Levels of agreement and disagreement with the statement about the use of public money to support female political participation by election participation (column percentages)

	Regular Voters		Irregular Voters		Never Voted	
Strongly agree	12%	(1.165)	11%	(1.930)	6%	(1.850)
Agree	40%	(2.137)	37%	(3.266)	36%	(4.372)
Neither agree nor disagree	33%	(1.999)	35%	(2.719)	39%	(4.469)
Disagree	7%	(1.003)	8%	(1.259)	8%	(1.766)
Strongly disagree	1%	(0.210)	1%	(0.363)	3%	(1.134)
(Do not know)	6%	(0.819)	8%	(1.153)	7%	(1.548)
Total	100%	...	100%	...	100%	...

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

Individuals who vote regularly are more likely to be informed about policy issues and may place a greater value on fairness and representation in politics. As a result, they may be more inclined to support measures that use public funds to help political parties promote female representation. Data presented in **Table 18** confirmed that people who participated in elections were found to be more likely to believe that a prerequisite for political parties to receive public funding is that they actively advance and endorse female representation. Our analysis indicates that approximately half of regular voters either strongly agreed (12%) or agreed (40%) with the statement. Even after controlling for socio-demographic factors, being a regular voter was linked to a 68% higher probability of agreeing with the statement.⁴¹ The analysis showed that prior donation behaviour did have a significant impact on whether individuals agreed or disagreed

⁴¹ An ordered logistic regression analysis was performed to identify the factors influencing survey responses, excluding those who answered “don’t know.” The analysis, based on a sample of 2,804 participants, accounted for variables such as age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The model yielded statistically significant results (Wald $\chi^2(19) = 88$, Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.029$), indicating that these factors collectively influenced the respondents’ responses.

with the statement. Even after accounting for various socio-demographic factors, being a past donor increased the likelihood of agreeing with the statement by 80%⁴². This suggests that having donated in the past does inherently make people more likely to endorse this kind of policy proposal.

5. Key informant interviews with thematic experts

5.1. Effectiveness of the Electoral Commission in the implementation of the PFA

The respondents⁴³ had mixed views on how effective they believe the Political Funding Act (PFA) is being implemented by the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC). While there is broad recognition of the IEC's efforts to uphold the Act's provisions, respondents have highlighted several challenges and areas for improvement.

An IEC official (R2) affirmed the IEC's commitment to implementing the Act despite the institution's constraints. According to R2, *"the Electoral Commission is doing its utmost best to implement this legislation with the capacity it has and within the environment, both legislative and otherwise."* However, this balance is delicate, as the PFA imposes penalties on political parties, such as suspending funding for non-compliance, which can appear contradictory to the goal of levelling the playing field for example by implementing election legislation and by the provision of public funding for political parties. R2 suggests that while the IEC is doing its best, structural factors limit its effectiveness.

"The Commission is finding itself having to balance the two roles, the two responsibilities, and I think it's doing its best to get that done." And "On one hand, the Electoral Commission has the responsibility to run free and fair elections, and to present a fair and level playing field for political parties to contest elections. But the PFA, in as much as one of its objectives is to level the playing field, it also imposes certain penalties on political parties" (R2).

"It is the Act itself I think is still part of the problem because the implementation is not as it is expected to be. I think the main question for most people ... [is] that ... everyone

⁴² An ordered logistic regression was conducted to determine the factors affecting survey responses, with participants who answered "don't know" excluded. The analysis included 2,822 individuals and controlled for variables including age, gender, population group, education level, province, and geotype. The model produced statistically significant findings (Wald $\chi^2(18) = 98$, Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.000$; Pseudo $R^2 = 0.029$), suggesting that these factors together had a meaningful impact on the respondents' answers.

⁴³ The respondents comprise gender experts, IEC officials, political party representatives, academics, civil society representatives, union and media representatives, and donors. Each of the respondents is identified by a unique (R) code. Some respondents expressed a preference that they be identified in the report, which is why they are named. Other respondents indicated that they wished to participate only if their anonymity is respected.

doubts whether the disclosures by the different political parties are exhaustive, that they ... disclose everything. I think most people think it is just the tip of the iceberg that we are seeing in terms of disclosures. I think the reason why the IEC struggles to implement it is because of the very nature of that. The political parties are strictly speaking against [the PFA's requirements] ... they don't really want to comply with the Act" (R45).

Another IEC official (R1) believes that the IEC is effectively implementing the PFA, while recognising both the IEC's strengths and weaknesses. R1 mentioned that the administrative arm of the IEC's Political Funding Unit (PFU) is reasonably capacitated, but the investigation function is not capacitated. Furthermore, R1 urged that the investigation function should be completely separated from the IEC to maintain the IEC's independence, adding that, while the IEC strives to remain impartial, it is aware of criticisms regarding aspects it does not directly tackle, although it views many of these as arising from differing interpretations of the Act.

Respondent 16 said *"I think, overall, we have no basis for suggesting that the IEC is not implementing the PFA effectively. If some evidence came to light that they were turning a blind eye to infringements, then that would change."* On the other hand, a civil society respondent felt that:

"They are attempting to, but they need to do more. The amounts declared are not reflected on the field. i.e. rallies and campaigns costs hundreds of millions. Which means funds are not properly declared and exceptions are not clearly defined" (R39).

Another political party holds a generally positive view of the IEC's ability to implement the PFA (R7, the ACDP). They believe that the Electoral Commission implements the PFA effectively, citing accountability, openness and impartiality:

"We believe the IEC is implementing the PFA effectively. Elements of accountability and openness are evident for all to see. We also appreciate the IEC's engagement with and assistance to political parties when the PFA was first implemented and when it was a steep learning curve to comply with the new statutory requirements" (ACDP).

This party believes that the Electoral Commission is the most appropriate institution for implementing the PFA given its constitutional independence found in Section 190 of the South African Constitution. They also applauded the Electoral Commission for its engagement with political parties, initially during the introduction of the then-Political Party Funding Act and subsequently after amendments to the now-Political Funding Act, noting that through their engagement with the IEC, their party's experience of the transition period was constructive.

5.2. Limitations in the Electoral Commission's capacity to implement the PFA

From the perspective of a major political party (R14), the IEC has a strong capacity to process the financial information it receives but lacks the ability to investigate undisclosed donations. R14 points out a significant gap in enforcement, noting that parties with suspicions about other parties' non-compliance must provide the IEC with concrete evidence of non-compliance, which is often difficult to obtain:

"There is certainly a gap in terms of the implementation that is happening at the moment. The IEC is very good in terms of looking at and checking out what they actually do receive from parties in terms of information. But there is certainly quite substantial information in terms of donations that has not been passed to the IEC, and there's nothing further that can be done, because the IEC requests, if there's a concern from a political party, that we come up with actual evidence of that, so de facto evidence, which is obviously extremely difficult to obtain."

Similarly, a media respondent and a corporate donor criticised the IEC's reliance on the honesty of political parties, expressing concern that the IEC does not proactively investigate credibility gaps arising between disclosures and examples of apparently expensive party activity.

"They claim that there's no obligation on them to investigate gaps in the disclosures. As far as I understand it, they essentially rely on the honesty of the parties to disclose. And I'm not aware of any investigations that they've done where there's a clear case of possible non-compliance by parties" (R53).

"..... there are loopholes in that they only rely on party disclosure. There should be other means to check honesty about funds received" (R62).

Some smaller political parties provide a somewhat different perspective. One respondent (R21) described the technical difficulties in registering and submitting funding declarations on the IEC's online platform.

"Initially it took us a while. It was quite a complex and complicated process to register on the IEC's website for the political party funding, for their funding declarations that are once a quarter. And their system is also very unreliable. When you submit manually, then I kind of feel like it's a black mark against our name because we haven't used the online system."

Another smaller party representative (R24) believes that while the IEC effectively engages with political parties through training and meetings, it does not seem to fully grasp or understand the operational complexities that influence political party funding and what political parties must deal with:

"I do, however, think the IEC does not necessarily always understand the operations of political parties, and it's not necessarily their fault. I think they are looking only at the Party [sic] Funding Act without understanding other things that influence funding and financial management of political parties."

This disconnect, they suggest, may hinder or create some barriers to the practical implementation of the Act by the IEC.

The perspective from a civil society organisation (CSO) representative, Lawson Naidoo, Executive Secretary of the Council for the Advancement of the Constitution (CASAC) (R35) is more measured. Naidoo views the introduction of the PFA as a positive step towards transparency, highlighting that before its implementation, party funding was largely opaque. However, concerns remain about the accuracy of financial disclosures, as there is no mechanism to verify whether the reported figures truly represent the total amount received by parties. As R35 mentioned,

"The elephant in the room is 'what is it that parties are not disclosing?'. There's no mechanism to test or verify that what they are disclosing is the sum total of what they've received. I think that's the big concern and frustration."

Another civil society representative, Joel Bregman, senior researcher with My Vote Counts (R36) takes a more favourable stance, emphasising that the IEC is functioning well within the legal framework:

"If we focus on the basic things like disclosures being published timeously with all the correct information, making it very accessible and user-friendly, and given that one of the main objectives of the Act is to provide transparency, to that extent the IEC is within the law's parameters."

Mohammed Valli Moosa, Chairperson of the Constitution Hill Trust and of WWF South Africa (R25), also expressed the view that the IEC's implementation of the PFA is inadequate beyond the basics. Moosa acknowledged that the IEC fulfils its basic statutory duties such as allocating funds according to a formula and reports quarterly on disclosed donations. However, he recognised that there is strong criticism that the IEC fails to enforce accurate party reporting or investigate non-compliance:

"The IEC is not implementing the Act sufficiently. It's doing the basics of allocating money to political parties in terms of the formula in the Act, and it is also reporting quarterly very well on what parties [receive/report] give to the IEC. But it's not doing anything more than that. And it is as clear as daylight that parties are not reporting accurately to the IEC but the IEC doesn't do anything about that at all, not even with a light touch."

However, an academic respondent (R43) points out the broader systemic challenges, arguing that the IEC may lack access to key partners.

"I think it is a very important starting point to ... get an instrument like the PFA to work. About the question of effectiveness, that is possibly more difficult because I am not so sure that the IEC has all the necessary access to institutions and role players in this regard, especially in an environment that is rife with corruption, nepotism and so on."

Communication on actions being taken emerges as another critical area for improvement. Donor respondents (R64, R65) the latter being directors of Fynbos Ekwiteit, highlight a lack of structured updates and widespread public confusion regarding the IEC's role. *"I think the IEC could improve its communication. Government departments communicate regularly in a structured, auditable manner, and the IEC should consider a similar approach—perhaps issuing updates every four to six months"* (R64).

One of the donor respondents, Fynbos Ekwiteit, also brought up the lack of clear communication in relation to the role of the IEC and thought that *"There is also public confusion about the IEC's role. Some people misunderstand its function in implementing, monitoring, and reporting on the PFA, mistaking it for a governance or judicial body. Clear communication could help address this misconception."*

Respondents' observations on the IEC's implementation of the PFA indicate that while the IEC's efforts are acknowledged, its effectiveness is hampered by several limitations. These constraints appear to stem from the IEC's lack of investigative capacity (although it has the authority), technical inefficiencies in the online funding declaration platform, and communication gaps that may affect both donors' and the public's understanding of the IEC's role. To address these challenges, several recommendations emerged, including strengthening the IEC's capacity to verify financial disclosures more effectively, improving the reliability and accessibility of its electronic reporting systems by simplifying processes like registration on the IEC's platform, automating reminders for timely declaration submissions, and enhancing public engagement to clarify the IEC's role beyond conducting elections.

5.3. Impartiality of the Electoral Commission

This issue of impartiality elicited varying responses, with some political parties expressing concerns about biases, while other respondents defended the IEC's neutrality and pointed to the challenging task of maintaining neutrality when executing its sensitive functions.

A major political party respondent (R14) voiced dissatisfaction, arguing that:

"the perception from our point of view is that we're not happy with the impartiality of the IEC. We kind of feel that there are glaring omissions which I think are self-evident even to a non-political party specialist in terms of non-declarations by parties which don't seem to have any further follow-up or whatever from the IEC. And I just feel that the IEC has been incredibly nitpicking in terms of information."

Similarly, a smaller political party respondent (R21) questioned the IEC's impartiality, stating:

"when I look at the parties and I look at their activities and knowing who the funders are, I don't think [the IEC is] necessarily impartial because there is blatant non-disclosure from other parties or, you know, in general. And there is also blatant non-compliance in the form of not having financial statements audited."

Another smaller political party respondent (R24) adopted a more neutral stance, noting:

"I think if we look at the information available to us, it seems as if it's being done impartially. However, we don't know whether we are all treated the same because there's no reporting on whether all political parties are complying."

Another political party noted some structural unfairness, most notably around funding allocation:

"We believe they do implement the PFA impartially. However, the PFA itself does not appear to be impartial as it favours larger parties, particularly in the 90/10 [formula for] allocation of funds rather than the [previous] 66/33 ... [allocation formula]. This is no fault of the IEC but a result of the legislative amendment to Schedule 2 contained in the Electoral Matters Amendment Act 14 of 2024..." (ACDP, R7).

Therefore, from this perspective, the law, rather than the implementer (the Electoral Commission) lacks impartiality.

CASAC's Lawson Naidoo defended the IEC's neutrality, asserting, *"I don't doubt the impartiality of the Commission... I think that the question is whether they have the powers that some people might like to see."*

A political party respondent reported the following *"I don't think the IEC's got a bias towards any particular party, but it was most unfortunate that we were lumped in with six other parties and told that we had a penalty. Ultimately, they reversed the decision, and they owned up to it being an error, but it could also be bias" (R16).* A civil society respondent indicated that there is *"no reason to believe they are not [being impartial]. They [were] soft on the parties in the transition phase. The time has come for them to be firm" (R39).*

MVC's Joel Bregman acknowledged the challenges the IEC faces, noting that:

"Because of the position that the IEC finds itself in, there's a constant awareness of its need to be seen to be impartial. I think that the IEC is always going to struggle with being seen to be impartial. It's inevitable that they are going to get drawn into political skirmishes, and not just on party funding issues, for example, when Zuma and the MKP went to the electoral court and the IEC was accused of targeting Zuma. So, I think its positionality is ripe for these sorts of accusations, but from our perspective there's no evidence that the IEC has ever

implemented this Act in a way which is biased or partisan or favours one party over another. But we fully understand the 'precarious' position the IEC finds itself in."

An academic respondent (R43) raised concerns about potential bias towards ruling parties, stating:

"My concern when it comes to impartiality will be, how do they treat the parties in government? Because the parties in government have close connections to the bigger regime.... And nationally, it was the ANC, currently with the government of national unity, it's becoming more complicated. How do they take action where there's very strong regime influences? So it seems to me as if there are two levels, all are equal, but some are more equal than others. And I think it is difficult to implement impartially if you have parties that are part of a well-established regime."

Other respondents were more supportive of the IEC's impartiality. The media respondent (R53) simply stated, *"I think they're doing it impartially."* A donor respondent (R64) echoed this sentiment, stating, *"Yes, in our experience, the IEC has been impartial and fair."* Another donor respondent (Fynbos Ekwiteit, R65) reinforced this view, asserting, *"I do think the IEC is independent, from my experience. We've never found anything that raises a question about its independence. We think it's important that they should be independent."* An IEC official (R1) also believes the IEC's impartiality remains intact despite its responsibility to implement the PFA.

The responses reflect divergence in perceptions regarding the IEC's impartiality. While some respondents, particularly from political parties, expressed scepticism, others, including civil society and donor respondents, affirmed the Commission's neutrality. The IEC's biggest challenge therefore remains to provide as much transparency and consistency as possible during the enforcement of the PFA and its regulations, building trust in its interactions with political parties. Any sign of what may be perceived as favouritism or not 'noticing' glaring financial discrepancies between parties' disclosure submissions and contradictory information in the public domain, such as expensive campaign activities, may be viewed as being partial or taking sides.

5.4. Monitoring and enforcing compliance with the PFA

Concerns regarding the IEC's monitoring of compliance with the PFA are widespread, with respondents highlighting both structural limitations and perceived enforcement weaknesses.

R3 acknowledged that various individuals and political entities, including ActionSA, have raised concerns about the IEC's monitoring. However, R3 differentiates between complaints based on political motives and those stemming from misunderstandings of the legislation. Similarly, R2 reasoned that some interpretations of the Act are subjective, and that the legislation itself is poorly drafted. As a result, the IEC has frequently sought legal opinions, which have often been contradictory, leaving the IEC facing a dilemma. R2 noted that, *"there are differences of*

interpretation of certain provisions of the Act, which is not one of the best-drafted pieces of legislation. There is a lot that I think could have been drafted much, much better."

A major political party representative (R14) strongly criticised the IEC's approach, particularly its reliance on political parties to report each other's non-compliance. They argued that the burden of proof should not rest on rival parties, as they lack access to each other's financial records. R14 describes the situation as *"impossible,"* emphasising that parties can only estimate their opponents' spending based on visible activities, leading to inferences of gaps between declarations and reality.

Similarly, R21 a smaller political party representative expressed scepticism about the IEC's enforcement capabilities, arguing that the penalties levied are too lenient. *"I don't think they're very good at enforcing compliance because it doesn't seem effective—you just get your name published on a list and receive a slap on the wrist."* R24, a smaller political party respondent expanded on this concern, emphasising that, while monitoring is in place, the IEC lacks investigative capacities. However, R24 expressed some understanding for the IEC's approach, arguing that *"they can't go into a process to double-check whether the information that has been submitted to them, that's been signed off by the party auditors, is actually correct."*

Another political party participant (R16) also believes that there is inconsistency in monitoring compliance. The participant indicated the following: *"[There is] inconsistency in the way they are monitoring compliance. It cannot be that the table of income and expenditure, how you report that, especially the expenditure part, changes from one year to the other. There's something that I think is lacking there in terms of consistency."* R39, a CSO participant, felt that *"There are concerns in civil society about the lack of funding [i.e., donation] declarations."*

Another smaller political party (R7, the ACDP) recognised that a lack of forensic expertise within the Commission is an obstacle to effective enforcement. The party believes that the IEC should focus on administrative enforcement with penalties including fines. The party therefore expressed overarching support for strengthening the IEC's resources and capacity to ensure meaningful enforcement of administrative non-compliance, such as with the provisions of s.14 on monitoring and inspection. The interviewee submitted that more serious offences may require the involvement of agencies in the criminal justice system:

"The IEC's constitutional mandate to ensure free and fair elections does not conflict with its monitoring, compliance, and enforcement responsibilities in terms of the PFA...For example, the IEC may not have forensic expertise to fully investigate non-compliance with the PFA. In such cases, the SAPS, Hawks and NPA would be required to investigate and prosecute the most serious offences set out in s.19, where criminal sanctions can be imposed. We believe that the IEC is the appropriate organisation to impose the administrative fines referred to in s.18" (R7).

Lawson Naidoo highlighted the confusion surrounding the IEC's role and powers, noting that suspicions about non-disclosure persist due to a lack of visible consequences. He supports the IEC taking a more proactive approach in scrutinising political parties' financial submissions, ensuring that claims of receiving no funding above the threshold are thoroughly verified. To support this, a whistleblower mechanism is proposed so that credible evidence can be provided to the IEC to enable an investigation. He posed the question: *"Does the IEC have a whistleblower hotline or channel for individuals who may possess evidence relevant to the Commission?"*.

An academic respondent (R43) shares similar concerns, arguing that while the IEC can verify reported data, it may be seeing only *"the tip of the iceberg."* It is emphasised that political implications may deter donors from full transparency but acknowledged that the PFA has contributed to levelling the playing field since its implementation.

An IEC official also conceded that there are practical limitations in monitoring political funding:

"...we work with audited financial statements and that works as a buffer between us and a party, knowing that they come from a credible audit firm. We take what we get at face value until of course somebody lodges a complaint or an objection" (R4).

From a media perspective, R53 finds the IEC's monitoring inadequate, questioning why the Commission does not challenge parties on the origins of their funding. *"They're clearly not fully monitoring compliance because why don't they ask parties, where did you get the money for this and that [expense or event]?"* Donor respondents (R64 and Fynbos Ekwiteit) expressed concerns about the voluntary nature of compliance, with Fynbos Ekwiteit emphasising, *"The Act seems to rely on voluntary compliance—parties self-reporting their funding. But what if they don't? What if funds are used differently than reported? The IEC currently lacks the power to compel disclosure or investigate effectively."*

To address this gap, at least in part, one interviewee, Valli Moosa (R25), proposed that the Auditor-General of South Africa (AG) should be more effectively utilised to audit parties' finances. However, the AG has not yet exercised this authority to audit parties' use of public funding, which already exists in the PFA,⁴⁴ may face similar political backlash and accusations of bias. A solution may be mandatory or compulsory audits by the AG. Here, Moosa suggested that the PFA may need to be amended to compel the AG to audit all political parties, perhaps on a rotating basis, for example, once every two to five years. If auditing by the AG was no longer an option but an obligation in terms of the PFA, this would provide the AG with "legal cover" to prevent accusations of selectivity or bias. Moosa suggested that such an amendment would enable a predictable and transparent enforcement mechanism, alleviating concerns of bias while enhancing deterrence and internal party accountability.

⁴⁴ The AG's auditing authority extends only to public funds and does not include private donations or other private income – s.12(5) of the PFA.

Moosa also acknowledged criticisms of the existing compliance and reporting culture, which includes a suspicion of widespread non-compliance with the PFA through political parties under-reporting their donations and not being required to disclose all expenditure, especially during a national election campaign. Therefore, for Moosa, the current low level of compliance and weak enforcement creates an environment where incomplete reporting has minimal consequences. Here, he commented:

"I don't think that parties in general respected those obligations, because I don't believe that the parties reported on the money they [received and] spent during the ... campaign for the [2024] national elections. If I look at the numbers there, I don't believe it for a moment. Maybe one or two parties did report accurately. But in general, I think there was a lot of non-reporting. But the reasons for that may or may not have to do with the lacuna [in the amended PFA].⁴⁵ If I remember correctly, My Vote Counts wrote to all the political parties and said to them that it could be unlawful for them not to report [even despite the removal of the donation disclosure threshold and cap], and they are being given notice of this. Maybe that influenced [some parties to continue making donations disclosures to the IEC]. [E]ven before the judgment, My Vote Counts had written to the political parties informing them that that it would be unlawful for them [not to comply with the disclosure and reporting obligations]. I don't know the exact timing of it, but I think that's what [happened]." (R25).

Overall, the responses indicate that it is challenging to separate monitoring from compliance-related questions since these are intricately linked in practice. While the IEC has established a compliance monitoring system, it clearly faces major limitations in doing so effectively so that it is able to undertake effective enforcement action where required. The regulatory system's reliance on self-reporting, the IEC's lack of forensic investigative capacity, and unclear legal provisions were highlighted by several respondents as significant obstacles. Strengthening the IEC's authority to verify financial disclosures and introducing mechanisms for whistleblower reporting may help address these gaps and enhance transparency in political funding. Again, this clearly links back to the first question where respondents indicated that the IEC needs investigative capacity (not legal powers, which it already has) beyond what it has currently.⁴⁶

Concerns about the IEC's ability to enforce compliance with the Political Funding Act (PFA) are widespread among respondents, with many pointing to limitations in its powers and challenges in implementation.

⁴⁵ The amendment of the PPFA by the Electoral Matters Amendment Act (EMAA) meant that the newly named PFA imposed no obligations on political parties to disclose donations above the threshold and cap that EMMA removed from the PPFA.

⁴⁶ **Authors' note:** Many respondents seemed a little unclear about the distinction between 'power' and 'powers'. Others may be unaware of the IEC's extensive statutory powers because they are not often on display. The IEC already has extensive investigative legal powers or authority, provided for in s.14 - s.19 of the Act. Where the IEC appears to be deficient is in its capacity or capabilities, i.e., power, to effectively utilise those powers.

According to some respondents, various political parties, including ActionSA, have raised concerns about the IEC's enforcement efforts. Some complaints, however, *"are informed by limited understanding of the legislation, or interpreting the legislation to suit their own narrative"* (R2). They also noted that ambiguities in the Act have forced the Commission to seek multiple legal opinions, many of which contradict one another, further complicating enforcement.

A smaller political party representative (R21) expressed scepticism about the IEC's overall effectiveness, stating that *"the monitoring and enforcement, I think, are really quite poor."* This view was supported by another smaller party representative, R24, who noted that while the IEC can issue warnings and approach the court to impose penalties, *"it's still a concern to us that they don't have the means to actually investigate."* Without investigative capabilities, enforcement remains weak as the Commission cannot adequately investigate some of the glaring allegations.

"I know there was a complaint that was raised against the EFF. The EFF was seen using the Moses Mabhida Stadium and it is known how much it costs to hire that stadium. Whether they got it in kind through someone or paid for it, [the party] needed to reflect [that in its disclosure report to the IEC]. If it doesn't reflect, people were within their rights to approach the Electoral Commission and say if you look at the declaration amount and what [activities and expenditure] you are seeing on the ground, it does not make sense. It does not gel" (R4).

Lawson Naidoo (R35) raised a pertinent question about the IEC's legal authority when he asked:

"It's unclear at what point the IEC can intervene if it receives a financial return or disclosure report from a political party. Can it act on a suspicion [of irregularity or non-compliance], or must it have evidence to suggest that it is inaccurate before they can act?"

This uncertainty undermines the perception of the IEC's ability to enforce compliance effectively.

Joel Bregman (R36) believes that the IEC does possess strong enforcement powers under the Act, including the ability to conduct financial inspections and audits. However, he questions whether these powers have ever been fully exercised: *"Maybe they need to be strengthened. Maybe there's some understanding in the IEC that they can only go up to a certain point and beyond that, then they'd be overstepping, you know?"* Bregman further suggested that more proactive legal authority may be required, particularly in collaboration with institutions like the Financial Intelligence Centre (FIC), SARS and banks, to ensure comprehensive and effective monitoring of financial flows and robust enforcement.

An academic respondent (R43) raised a broader systemic concern, linking enforcement challenges to state capture. R43 argued that high-profile scandals, such as the VBS Bank case involving the ANC and EFF, reveal the limitations of the IEC's enforcement powers: *"State capture, as exposed by the Zondo Commission, also complicates oversight."* This suggests that the IEC may lack the necessary legal authority, or political cover, to act decisively in such cases.

From a media perspective, R53 provided an example of non-enforcement by the IEC, citing the ANC's settlement of a significant debt after the 2019 elections: *"They settled a bill of over R100 million. But there were no questions about where they got that money from, and yes, they're not enforcing compliance."* The ANC had not disclosed donations approximating this amount. This example reflects broader concerns about the IEC's seeming reluctance or inability to probe potentially serious and damaging financial irregularities.

A donor (R64) succinctly summarised a recurring critique: *"The IEC currently lacks the power to compel disclosure or investigate effectively."* So, without the ability to proactively verify financial disclosures, the IEC remains dependent on voluntary compliance, which limits its enforcement capacity.⁴⁷

While it is clear from interviews that the IEC has some enforcement tools at its disposal, respondents also widely believe that these tools are either underutilised or not up to the task of a full investigation based on irregularities picked up in ways other than voluntary disclosure by political parties. Many respondents argued that strengthening the IEC's investigative and enforcement capabilities, potentially through legal reforms and inter-agency collaboration, would be necessary to ensure greater accountability in political funding transparency.

Disagreements and conflicts between political parties or independent candidates and the IEC regarding the implementation of the PFA were mentioned by multiple respondents, with concerns ranging from what are believed to be inconsistencies in financial oversight to disputes over disclosure requirements.

A major political party representative (R14) highlighted inconsistencies in the IEC's financial review process, noting that staff changes have seemingly led to shifting standards in evaluating financial statements:

"An annual financial statement which we have put in previously to the IEC will basically then come back with no concerns or a certain concern in a certain area. Then if we put the same

⁴⁷ **Authors' note:** Again, this statement appears to reflect the differences in interpretation of the Commission's legal powers. On a plain reading of the provisions of s.14 of the Act, it is not obviously unreasonable to interpret them to mean that they afford the Commission proactive powers of investigation.

thing in the following year, there will be new concerns that come up, even though the financial statements were the same as what was produced in previous years."

One of the smaller party representatives (R21) described significant pushback from political parties when the IEC introduced new declaration requirements, highlighting that parties were frustrated by sudden changes to funding disclosure rules: *"The parties were unhappy because you can't open the funding cycle, allow funds from anyone, and then suddenly require disclosure."* A second smaller party representative (R24) also noted that rumours of enforcement against specific parties were noticed via informal 'passage talk' by stating that information about legal action taken by the IEC against parties is not widely available:

"It would only be information that we hear in the passages or when you attend a meeting, and they say that they're taking parties to court or they've suspended payment to a party. But again, we're not aware of which parties it is or what the problems were."

Joel Bregman (R36) discussed ActionSA's vocal criticism of the IEC's lack of enforcement action, particularly concerning the possibility or likelihood of undisclosed private donations by parties like MKP and EFF. However, the complexities of party financing are acknowledged when considering that other sources of income such as smaller donations, membership fees and some loans are normally not reported to the IEC. This may influence compliance perceptions.

The academic respondent (R43) raised concerns about the IEC's ability to address what is perceived as questionable funding sources, referencing the ANC's recent financial recovery and suggesting that stronger oversight is needed:

"If they receive a lot of money, will the IEC be able to deal with this, to call the ANC to order and to deal with this in a proper way, and if necessary, going to court if that seems to be [required]?"

An ongoing legal challenge was highlighted by R53 (media respondent) related to the ANC's recent settlement of over R100 million in debt accumulated after the 2019 elections, which raises questions about the lack of scrutiny over the source of the funds: *"Is it ActionSA or is it another party who is challenging this R100-plus million [debt] settlement of the ANC? And it's not the first time. There've been previous instances."*

Overall, most of the respondents indicated that the IEC's implementation of the PFA has led to significant disagreements with political parties. These disagreements stem from their perceptions about inconsistencies in financial monitoring and oversight, particularly where the expenditures by other political parties did not align with reported donations. This misalignment has led to concerns about what are thought to be unevenness in enforcement of the law. Political party representatives also reported disputes with the IEC over the 'sudden' changes in disclosure rules or procedures during a funding cycle.

5.5. Additional capacity for the Electoral Commission

Building on the theme of PFA implementation, this section explores respondents' perceptions concerning whether the IEC requires additional capacity to fulfil its mandate effectively.

Respondents highlighted a range of capacities that they believe the IEC requires to effectively ensure compliance with the PFA by political parties and other stakeholders. A recurring theme is the need for technological capacity, particularly in monitoring financial flows and political activities. For example, R2 emphasised the importance of leveraging technology to ensure transparency and accountability, stating:

"A lot more capacity will need to be built in a number of areas. One of them that we cannot leave out, mindful that we are in the fourth industrial revolution, is technological capacity: the ability to use technology to monitor financial flows into political parties. Another technology is drones to monitor rallies by political parties. Apparently, several countries use drones to capture necessary data, which is computed to build a picture of how much money is involved and whether its expenditure matches its declared income. Secondly, forensic capacity, which is quite expensive" (R2).

This suggests that the IEC must invest in advanced tools like data analytics to track campaign expenditures and ensure they align with declared incomes. R21 (a smaller political party representative) also stressed the need for automation and system improvements, noting, *"They should automate more processes and provide clearer instructions and exceptions"*. This indicates that technological upgrades and advances are essential for efficiency and accuracy in monitoring compliance. Similarly, another political party also noted:

"The IEC has argued that it needs more personnel, technical resources and training to effectively investigate and prosecute any non-compliance with the PFA. We consequently believe that additional capacity should be given to the IEC to enable it to ensure compliance with the PFA. This includes additional funding for skilled personnel to effectively exercise the substantial monitoring and inspection powers contained in Section 14 of the PFA, as requested by the IEC" (R7, ACDP).

Another critical area is forensic auditing capacity, which is repeatedly identified as indispensable for the IEC. R2 underscored the importance of forensic auditing to scrutinise political parties' financial activities, stating, *"Forensic capacity, which is quite expensive... the PFA authorises the IEC to legally deploy forensic auditing capacity to scrutinise the internal workings of these private entities [i.e., political parties]."* A larger political party representative (R14) succinctly echoed this, saying, *"It is the forensic audit capacity for the IEC to go out and check this sort of stuff."* Fynbos Ekwiteit (R65) elaborated on the need for specialised auditing expertise, suggesting that *"The IEC must create a division of enforcement or financial compliance, led by somebody with*

an auditing qualification." R39 a civil society participant also urged that *"Some auditing and forensic auditing is needed."* This highlights the need for sufficient numbers of appropriately skilled and specialised staff to conduct desktop investigations and identify red flags in financial reports.

Closely tied to forensic capacity is the need for investigative capacity, which respondents noted is currently limited. A smaller party representative (R24) pointed out the challenges, stating, *"The IEC is not necessarily an investigating body... they don't have the power to investigate, which I think is a challenge for the IEC."* Bregman (R36) added that the IEC's capacity to investigate complaints is constrained, noting, *"Perhaps the IEC lacks the capacity to investigate those complaints... their hands are tied to some degree."* However, the academic (R53) observed that the IEC does have some investigative powers under existing legislation, stating, *"They have some powers in terms of the various election Acts and the Commission Act to investigate problems."* This suggests that, while the IEC has some investigative powers in terms of the PFA, the IEC currently lacks the specialised legal and operational capacity to conduct thorough investigations that are required.

The IEC also requires specialised legal capacity and the necessary authority to enforce compliance effectively. In this regard, R2 suggested that the IEC should have the legal mandate to collaborate with other institutions like SARS and the FIC, stating, *"The capacity needed by the IEC is the legal authority to request assistance from these institutions."* Fynbos Ekwiteit (R65) emphasised the importance of legal authority to access financial records, noting, *"They need legal authority to access bank accounts directly for themselves."* This indicates that without robust legal backing through clear legal provisions, as well as expertise and effective collaboration with other institutions, the IEC's ability to enforce compliance may be significantly hamstrung.

In order to strengthen its legal and investigative capacities, it was suggested that the IEC focus on enhancing its human resource capacity by bringing in skilled and qualified personnel. R43 highlighted the importance of recruiting qualified accountants and forensic experts, stating, *"We need people that are proper accountants that can deal with that matter. These people are very expensive."* Fynbos Ekwiteit also emphasised the need for specialised staff, noting, *"They need to be able to understand the reports they receive, understand the environment and monitor campaigns, identify red flags, etc."* However, R24 cautioned that simply increasing staff numbers is insufficient without the legal authority to act, stating, *"Even if you give them more staff, unless the Act gives them some teeth to take action, it doesn't help to have more staff to do investigations."* This underscores the need for both skilled personnel and the legal framework to support their work.

Another crucial area is public awareness capacity, which respondents identified as essential for promoting compliance and fostering accountability. Joel Bregman of MVC highlighted the lack of public knowledge about the PFA, stating, *"The Act isn't something which a lot of people know about... there should be a long-term public awareness campaign, which is very expensive to do."* This suggests that increasing public awareness could create a *"built-in check and balance"* system, as citizens would be better equipped to identify and report violations.

Respondents believe that the IEC should strengthen its independence and foster partnerships with other oversight bodies to function effectively. R43 emphasised the importance of collaboration with other institutions, stating, *"They need to link to financial oversight institutions, with legislators within national Parliament and other institutions."* Fynbos Ekwiteit highlighted the role of independence in ensuring accountability, noting, *"Independence is the name of the game. Independence gives most people an incredible sense of responsibility and capacity - it empowers them."*

Analysis of these responses demonstrates that to ensure effective compliance with the Act, the IEC requires a multifaceted approach to capacity-building. This includes investing in technological tools, enhancing statutory authority and investigative capacity, developing forensic and auditing expertise or recruiting skilled personnel, launching public awareness campaigns, and fostering coordination with other oversight bodies while maintaining the Commission's independence. As R2 aptly summarised, *"Elections are fundamental to democracy and to the sovereignty of the state. Therefore, any capture of political parties has grave implications."* Building these capacities is therefore essential to safeguarding the integrity of South Africa's democratic processes.

5.6. The impact of the PFA on the IEC's perceived impartiality in managing free and fair elections

This section examines the IEC's dual mandate—conducting free and fair elections while administering the PFA, specifically probing perceptions of its ability to maintain its impartiality in this dual role.

The question of whether the IEC's constitutional mandate to ensure free and fair elections conflicts with its monitoring, compliance and enforcement responsibilities under the Political Funding Act (PFA) elicited a range of perspectives, but the overarching narrative suggests that these mandates are not inherently in conflict. Instead, the challenges lie in their practical implementation, resource constraints, and the politically charged environment in which the IEC operates.

One respondent (R2) argued that the two mandates *"are not necessarily in conflict"* with each other but acknowledged the inherent tensions arising from the *"nature of politics, being a game*

of power ... and retaining power." The respondent referenced a recent case in Romania where a court set aside an election result due to undisclosed political funding and its influence on the election result,⁴⁸ underscoring the high stakes of ensuring accurate funding transparency. The example illustrates how non-compliance with funding regulations can undermine the perception and reality of free and fair elections. R2 further suggested that the IEC might need to adopt stricter measures, such as requiring declarations of zero donations, to mitigate such risks.

The current system is described by R21 (smaller party representative) as *"chaotic and unstructured,"* pointing out a disconnect between the IEC's dual responsibilities. They note that while the IEC aims to ensure free and fair elections, it lacks sufficient *"input"* [i.e., budgetary support] from Parliament and struggles with enforcing compliance. R21 highlighted the ad hoc and limited nature of enforcement, where parties are given the option to *"either declare or not declare, pay a R40,000 fine, and just move on with their lives."* This suggests that the IEC's enforcement mechanisms may be insufficient to uphold its mandate.

Another smaller party representative (R24) emphasised the importance of investigative power, stating that *"unless the IEC has the power to investigate, they will declare it as a free election because they only work on the information that they have at hand."* This underscores the need for robust mechanisms to uncover hidden financial information, which is critical to upholding electoral integrity. Despite this, R24 believes the IEC can still deliver free and fair elections irrespective of the PFA, suggesting that the mandates are complementary rather than conflicting. This sentiment is echoed by Lawson Naidoo of CASAC and R64 (donor), with Naidoo stating that, *"the Commission's overall mandate is to ensure free and fair elections, and the public's right to information about who funds political parties ... is an integral part of the right to vote."* These respondents see the PFA as reinforcing the IEC's constitutional mandate rather than conflicting with it. Similarly, R64 (donor) describes the responsibilities as *"two sides of the same coin,"* emphasising that free and fair elections require a robust framework for monitoring political funding. However, they identify capacity as the key challenge, questioning whether the IEC has sufficient resources to fulfil both roles effectively.

Bregman reflects on the potential for bias but concludes that the law's structure mitigates this risk, stating, *"The way the law is structured and written means that there is little room for bias or misinterpretation."* It is acknowledged that there will be inevitable tensions faced by Chapter 9 institutions but sees no evidence of the mandates conflicting in practice. An academic (R43) shares this view by reflecting on institutional conflict as a natural and healthy part of democratic governance, asserting that, *"checks and balances cannot exist without conflict."* Bregman and

⁴⁸ Rowan Ings (2025) 'The TikTokers accused of triggering an election scandal' available at <https://www.bbc.com/articles/cqx41x3gn5zo> (accessed 18 March 2025).

R43 both argued that the IEC's implementation of the PFA is within its mandate and essential for accounting to Parliament.

Both R53 (media respondent) and Fynbos Ekwiteit (R65) provide succinct responses, with R53 simply stating, *"There's no conflict,"* and R65 arguing that the IEC's role inherently involves applying rules, which *"mean conflict."* R65 dismisses the idea of separating the mandates, stating, *"I don't really see the argument that the mandates should be separated in order to avoid conflict."* They emphasised that the IEC's application of rules is a core function, such as when parties apply to the Commission for registration, regardless of the tensions it may create. R16 agrees, stating *"I don't see that the monitoring and implementation of the PFA in any way contaminates the work to conduct free and fair elections. There's no evidence that they've compromised or allowed party political funding to contaminate any of their work in hosting or conducting elections, by-elections or national or provincial elections."*

On the other hand, Valli Moosa (R 25) expressed greater understanding for the IEC's difficulty in managing the two mandates:

"Having [initially supported the IEC having both mandates], I must just say that I can understand why the IEC is not doing that. And at the time of the drafting of the Act, which many of us tried to influence, we did think it was a good idea for the IEC to not only report on party funding and administer the money, but also to monitor reporting by the political parties and to investigate if need be. And so it seemed like a good idea. It even seemed like a good idea to the IEC at the time... ." But with hindsight, it wasn't a good idea [to give both responsibilities to the IEC] because the IEC is not doing it, I think for good reason, because they don't want to be accused falsely by political parties of being partisan. Because obviously they would then investigate party A, but not party B, because there would be prima facie evidence that party A is not reporting but there wouldn't be such prima facie evidence about party B, who would seem to be reporting everything, and so the IEC would seem to be partisan. And there are parties now in existence who deliberately want to make the IEC look partisan. And if that is the case, then the supporters of those parties will not think that the declaration of free and fair elections by the IEC, which is the most important thing they have to do, is credible, then that has that has big implications for stability. And so I can understand that [the IEC] don't do that." (Valli Moosa, R25).

This interviewee perceives institutional hesitancy, most notably arising from political neutrality concerns where the IEC's reluctance to investigate is partly attributed to fears of being seen as partisan, especially in a politically charged environment. Furthermore, parties may also use disputes over implementation of the PFA to manufacture and manipulate efforts to discredit the IEC and undermine its core constitutional mandate of certifying free and fair elections. The sense was that protecting the IEC's reputation for impartiality is essential, even if this limits the IEC's enforcement capacity in terms of the PFA.

An example of how the IEC's administration of the PFA can create perceptions of partiality even when acting in good faith was provided by R2. This respondent described a situation during the 2024 general elections in which the IEC faced pressure to publish donation disclosures earlier than usual to ensure voters had relevant information before casting their ballots. The IEC ultimately published the donations disclosures report on 15 May, deviating from its usual practice of publication at the end of the month. R2 explained that *"the Commission had to decide how to deal with the perception that, if it adhered to its usual publication date, it might be hiding information that wasn't favourable to one or other party."* This highlights the delicate balance the IEC must strike between transparency and avoiding perceptions of bias arising from adhering to or departing from its usual schedule. Another example involved the disbursement of funds to political parties, where the IEC adjusted its procedures to release funds earlier during the election period in response to lobbying by parties. R2 noted that these complexities illustrate how the IEC's dual roles can create challenges, stating, *"It was the result of some parties lobbying 'the institution as a whole' in order to get their funds sooner."* These examples underscore how the IEC's implementation of the PFA can inadvertently fuel perceptions of partiality, even when its actions are procedurally sound and this was not the intent.

The larger political party respondent (R14) stated that the IEC's responsibility to implement the PFA has *"negatively undermined"* its perceived impartiality. It was argued that *"it is a perception from our side, but I think it is a perception that is underlined by a lot of information, what we can see, what we are seeing."* This suggests that while the perception may not be universally held, it is grounded in observable actions or inaction by the IEC. Similarly, R21 (a smaller political party respondent) asserted that the IEC's impartiality has been *"definitely undermined,"* adding that *"I don't think the South African public have confidence in the IEC."* This reflects a broader scepticism about the IEC's ability to remain impartial while managing the politically sensitive task of monitoring party funding.

In contrast, the second smaller political party respondent (R24) disagreed, arguing that *"many people do separate the financial aspect versus the physical running of elections and ensuring free and fair elections."* This respondent stated that they have not encountered widespread concerns about the IEC's ability to run free and fair elections, suggesting that the public may be able to distinguish between the IEC's financial oversight and its electoral management roles.

CASAC's Lawson Naidoo also challenged the perception of undermined impartiality, calling it *"misplaced."* He emphasised that *"the IEC is implementing a piece of legislation that was passed by these same parties,"*. Naidoo also argued that broader public education is required to clarify the IEC's role in terms of the PFA. He therefore proposed that, *"a thorough and ongoing awareness campaign be conducted on social media"*, with the responsibility for educating the public shared by the media and civil society.

MVC's Joel Bregman acknowledged that the IEC faces low levels of public trust, a trend common among South African government institutions. It is noted that while the IEC has carried out its mandate properly, the additional responsibility of managing party funding has *"opened it up to critics,"* which may have damaged its perceived impartiality among some sectors and members of the public. Bregman cited the example of the MK Party, questioning why the IEC has not investigated it, as a source of public scepticism. Despite this, Bregman believes that the IEC has performed its duties impartially, stating, *"my opinion, and the position of My Vote Counts, is that they've done it well and impartially."*

Cautious optimism was expressed by R43 (academic) stating that the IEC's impartiality has not been undermined *"at this point,"* but warns that specific scenarios, such as undisclosed foreign funding to a major party, could drastically change public perceptions. R43 argued that *"if, for example, R120 million were paid from Iran to the ANC,⁴⁹ and it was not properly checked by the IEC, this will be a serious danger for the integrity of the IEC."* This highlights the high stakes of the IEC's financial oversight role and the potential for significant reputational damage if it fails to follow up and act on critical information.

The media (R53) and donor (R64) respondents offered more positive assessments. R53 simply stated, *"No, I don't think so,"* indicating no perceived conflict between the IEC's roles. R64 focused on the IEC's lack of investigative power as its primary challenge, arguing that *"if it had more authority to investigate and enforce compliance, its credibility would be stronger."* Both R53 and R64 suggest that the issue may not be partiality but rather a lack of capacity, emphasising that the IEC's credibility depends on its ability to act on available information.

The responses to perceptions of the IEC's ability to remain impartial due to its dual mandate reveal a mixed picture. While some respondents believe the IEC's implementation of the PFA has undermined perceptions of its impartiality, others argue that these perceptions are misplaced, and that the IEC has performed its duties impartially. The interviews, therefore, collectively but with a few exceptions, suggest that the IEC's constitutional mandate and its responsibilities under the PFA are not inherently in conflict. Examples were cited in which the IEC was faced with delicate choices concerning its administrative implementation of the PFA. It appears to have navigated these sensitive situations well, as no respondent mentioned these events and the IEC's decisions as reasons for dissatisfaction. Instead, the challenges are with the practical implementation of these mandates in the context of resource constraints, limited enforcement mechanisms at the IEC's disposal, and the often politically charged nature of

⁴⁹ This is a reference to the allegation that Iran funded South Africa to bring its genocide case against Israel to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). See Rebecca Davis 'Fact Check — Did Iran fund South Africa's approach to the ICJ over Israel?' *Daily Maverick* 25 January 2024. Available at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-01-25-iran-fund-south-africa-icj-israel-palestine-fact-check/> (accessed 20 April 2025).

electoral processes. While some respondents argued that the IEC's impartiality has been negatively affected, others believe that the PFA reinforces its credibility, provided the institution is given adequate resources and authority to fulfil its mandate effectively.

The challenges lie in managing public perceptions, addressing capacity constraints, and ensuring robust enforcement mechanisms. Therefore, the IEC's ability to maintain its credibility and impartiality depends to a large extent on its ability to navigate these complexities effectively. This may be supported by public education and the availability of adequate resources to do justice to its mandate and responsibilities. Thus, while some respondents highlighted potential tensions and unintended consequences, the prevailing view is that transparency in political funding is integral to ensuring free and fair elections, and the IEC's dual roles are complementary rather than contradictory.

5.7. Is the IEC the most appropriate institution to implement the PFA?

Considering all the IEC's limitations and challenges discussed above, respondents expressed a range of perspectives when asked which organisation other than the IEC could potentially implement the PFA. Most respondents were nevertheless in support of the IEC's role while acknowledging the challenges it faces. The analysis of responses reveals a consensus that the IEC, despite its limitations, is well-suited for this responsibility due to its existing expertise, constitutional authority and credibility, and established relationships with political parties. For example, a political party participant (R16) indicated *"Yes, I don't think we need any more institutions. I can't think of any other existing institution that should deal with this."* Another political party participant (R17) felt that *"No other [organisation] can do it better. Everyone is treated the same. There is no favouritism."* However, concerns were expressed about the IEC's capacity, possible resource constraints, and the real potential and threat of accusations of bias.

"There is a degree, I think, to which that happens with the IEC. ... [T]he IEC's systems must be able to speak to SARS for example around donations, and ... must be able to speak to all of these other institutions, you know, the FIC, around international funding and having also the expertise inhouse for the IEC to be able build the systems that allow you to engage with all of these different databases and data sources as well" (R50).

"I think, outside of the IEC, is Treasury itself, because we get the [public] funds [for disbursement to parties and candidates] through the [National] Treasury. We account to the Treasury [for the management of these funds]. And for me, other than this, because SARS is a different entity, because it looks at mostly issues around tax, but in terms of the implementation, if it was not IEC, for me, I would say it would probably be a directorate within Treasury. Treasury, because they are also used to monitoring compliance when it comes to dealing with funding. It makes sense. It's just that when it comes to the Electoral

Commission, we already have a framework in place within which we work with political parties, so it's much easier" (R4).

R14, representing a larger political party, unequivocally supports the IEC's role, stating, *"I mean, it's a [Chapter] 9 [institution]. I think that they are the most appropriate institution to implement this Act, yes."* This reflects confidence in the IEC's constitutional mandate and its ability to deal with the complexities of political funding regulation. Similarly, R24, from a smaller political party, agreed that the IEC is the most appropriate institution but noted its limitations, particularly in terms of investigative capacity. R24 suggested that *"one will have to look at investigating bodies, such as perhaps the Auditor-General, that has the ways and means,"* indicating that while the IEC is suitable, it may need to collaborate with other institutions to fulfil its mandate effectively. A civil society representative (R39) also felt that the Auditor-General could perform this role. R39 indicated that *"You need teeth when doing this. An additional body is preferable, but the cost is a factor. Maybe the Auditor-General. The IEC needs the confidence of all political parties for their credibility not to be doubted".*

MVC's Joel Bregman strongly endorsed the IEC's role, emphasising its *"skills, an understanding of the political context, and the importance of the legislation"*. It was acknowledged that the IEC's expanded mandate has placed it in a *"precarious position,"* particularly given budget cuts, but argued that *"wherever this [mandate] lands up, that institution is going to be open to accusations of bias."* This suggests that the IEC's challenges are not unique and would likely be faced by any alternative body tasked with implementing the PFA. Bregman also recalled that the IEC was not initially enthusiastic about taking on this responsibility, recognising the enormity of the task and the potential for partisan accusations. Despite this, Bregman believes the IEC remains the most appropriate institution for the job.

The academic (R42) agreed that the IEC is the appropriate institution, but again raised concerns about its capacity. A collaborative approach was proposed with the statement, *"I think that the mandate should always be with the IEC, but they can collaborate with other institutions in order to do the job as long as they ensure the quality of the outcomes."* This highlights the need for partnerships to address resource and capacity gaps while maintaining the IEC's oversight role. The media respondent (R53) also supports the IEC's role, noting that *"the way they implemented it and the way they're running it probably points to that it was a good decision."* An argument is made against establishing a new agency, emphasising that the IEC's existing dealings with political parties make it well-suited for the task.

A donor (R64) also firmly believes that the IEC is the most appropriate institution, stating, *"There isn't a more suitable institution."* R64 cautioned against creating a new body, arguing that it would be unnecessary and that existing institutions should focus on fulfilling their mandates. However, the strain on the IEC was acknowledged, noting that it is *"stretched between its*

election oversight responsibilities and its role in implementing the PFA.” Another donor, Fynbos Ekweiteit (R65), echoed this sentiment, adding that if another body were to take on the PFA, it would likely be a parliamentary oversight committee, which could raise questions about its own impartiality. This underscores the difficulty of finding an alternative institution that could match the IEC’s relatively widely perceived neutrality, relevant knowledge and expertise.

In contrast, R21, from a smaller political party, expressed uncertainty about the IEC’s suitability, suggesting that political funding regulation might be better handled by SARS. They stated, *“I would recommend that that would form part of kind of a tax return that would need to be regulated by SARS.”* This, together with the National Treasury suggestion, reflects a minority view that the IEC may not be the ideal institution for this role, particularly given the complexities of financial regulation.

One respondent (R2) highlighted the challenges faced by the IEC in managing political funding disputes, noting that *“times have changed”* and the IEC’s impartiality is increasingly being questioned due to the more contested political landscape. R2 argued that *“the space is now much more contested”*, suggesting that separating the IEC’s electoral management mandate from its political funding responsibilities might be necessary. R2 pointed to examples in Malawi and Sierra Leone, where independent regulatory bodies handle political finance legislation, allowing the electoral management bodies (EMBs) to focus solely on elections. It was proposed that South Africa could benefit from a similar model, stating, *“I’m kind of inclined to think that this separation might be necessary.”* By way of any alternative proposal, R2 also referenced the PFA’s provision for a ‘firewalled’ unit or institution within the IEC, suggesting that *“the PFU must be insulated in some way so that it can do its work without interfering with or affecting the electoral management mandate of the Commission.”* This reflects a belief that if the IEC retained oversight, its political funding functions need greater independence to protect the integrity of both the PFU and the IEC as an EMB.

The idea of involving other institutions, particularly for forensic investigations, was supported by R14, representing a larger political party. It was suggested that *“the Auditor-General with basically the staff that is available within that sphere, I think would make a massive difference to the IEC in terms of what they can do.”* R14 further noted that while the IEC is effective at reviewing declared information, it lacks the capacity to uncover unreported breaches, stating, *“The IEC has got serious gaps in terms of what they can see with their eyes, but has not been reported to them on a declaration.”* This underscores earlier arguments for the need for specialised investigative expertise that the IEC currently lacks. An IEC official (R1) supported this view by suggesting that the investigation function related to alleged breaches of the PFA could be relocated elsewhere. This official believes that matters of investigation could be better suited to law enforcement agencies that are better equipped to deal with them.

R21 and R24, both from smaller political parties, proposed a collaborative approach by the Commission involving SARS and the Auditor-General. R21 suggested that *“the documentation and the declarations can be submitted to SARS which can then verify and check,”* with unexplained discrepancies referred to the Auditor-General. R24 similarly advocated for the Auditor-General’s involvement in investigations, adding that *“if there are criminal elements involved, you would take it to another level or to another body to handle the criminal aspect.”* Other institutions with specific expertise could therefore undertake detailed investigations and take on criminal matters but the argument is that the IEC should maintain oversight of this process.

There were also cautions expressed against creating a fragmented structure by MVC’s Bregman, who argued that *“you don’t want to end up with this sort of fragmented structure for implementing the Act.”* It is suggested that while the IEC should retain overall responsibility, it could collaborate with bodies like the Auditor-General and the Hawks (DPCI) for specific tasks. CASAC’s Naidoo expressed agreement, emphasising that *“the overall responsibility stays with one institution, so that the issue of accountability is clear,”* but acknowledged that *“there may be bodies that have the [relevant] capacity to be able to assist the Commission in executing its mandate.”*

Bregman agreed with Naidoo that the IEC should remain the primary institution for overseeing the PFA, stating, *“I don’t think there’s an existing organisation which makes more sense than the IEC.”* However, it was suggested that the IEC could collaborate more effectively with other bodies like SARS, the FIC and banks to enhance its investigative capacity. Bregman therefore argued that *“the responsibility should remain with the IEC,”* but that it should be able to call on other agencies for assistance.

The IEC’s mandate was supported by the academic (R42), but collaboration was advocated for with other specialised institutions to ensure quality outcomes. A *“public-private relationship”* was proposed to address capacity gaps:

“I think that the mandate should always be with the IEC, but they can collaborate with other institutions in order to do the job as long as they ensure the quality of the outcomes.”

The media respondent (R53) provided another option with the suggestion that the IEC could either conduct investigations itself or commission other agencies to do so on its behalf. It was argued that *“when the result of that investigation is clear that the law was transgressed, then it must go to the law enforcement agencies and the National Prosecuting Authority.”* This proposed option again reflects the earlier view that while the IEC should lead the process, serious breaches need to be escalated to law enforcement agencies such as the NPA.

The donor respondents R64 and R65 (Fynbos Ekwiteit) were very much in agreement in their views. They emphasised the need for robust enforcement. R64 suggested that *“serious breaches, such as corruption or bribery, should go directly to law enforcement agencies like the police or the National Prosecuting Authority,”* while issues of fairness or misuse of funds could be handled by an Ethics Committee or parliamentary oversight body. R65 echoed this sentiment, stating that *“if we take political funding transparency seriously, enforcement must be robust.”*

Paul Graham, another donor, presented a contrasting view, arguing that the IEC is not the appropriate institution to regulate political funding. He described the task as *“very substantive, even if you have a suitable budget,”* and note that *“fighting over money is one of the major potential points of conflict between the IEC and the parties.”* Graham believes that the IEC’s dual role as both an electoral manager and a financial regulator *“puts at risk, in my opinion, the mandate of administration and oversight of the election campaigns themselves.”* While he acknowledged that the Auditor-General (AG) might seem like an obvious alternative, he cautioned that *“all parties already have an adversarial relationship with the AG because they’re all implicated by the AG in irregularities in various spheres of government.”* However, Graham suggested that the AG could *“treat it [i.e., monitoring, oversight and forensic audits] more as a technical task and try to strip a little bit of the political stuff away from it,”* something the IEC cannot do despite its best efforts. Graham expressed scepticism about the IEC’s ability to maintain internal separation, stating, *“Even if it says we’ve got a separate bunch of people who handle the funding and we have nothing to do with it, I think the ‘leakage’ [of information between supposedly separate internal divisions] must be constant.”* Graham concluded that the IEC is likely to *“soft-pedal on questions of compliance,”* which he believes is the current public perception.

While most respondents agreed that the IEC should retain overall responsibility for implementing the PFA as earlier proposed, there is broad support for collaboration with other institutions to address capacity constraints and enhance investigative effectiveness. Bodies such as the Auditor-General, SARS, the Hawks and other law enforcement agencies were frequently cited as potential partners. However, Graham's and Moosa's perspectives introduce a significant counterpoint, arguing that the IEC’s dual mandate creates inherent conflicts, and that political funding regulation should be managed by a more technically focused body like the Auditor-General. The key message by respondents is that the IEC’s credibility and effective enforcement of the PFA depend on its ability to either enhance its capacities and leverage key external expertise and partnerships, or undertake internal restructuring to separate responsibilities, or to reconsider its role entirely, thereby ensuring that its core mandate of administering free and fair elections remains uncompromised.

Most respondents believe that the IEC is the most appropriate institution to implement the PFA, citing several reasons for this. These include the organisation's expertise, its institutional credibility as a Chapter 9 institution, and the established relationships that it has with political parties. However, concerns about capacity, resource constraints, and the potential for accusations of bias are again widely acknowledged. While some respondents suggested collaboration with other institutions or alternative regulatory bodies and another suggested internal restructuring within the IEC, the majority's view is that the IEC, despite its challenges, remains the best-suited institution for this critical role.

5.8. Compliance with the PFA during a gap in the law

This theme and question examine the prevailing narrative that, despite ongoing legal uncertainty arising from EMAA amendments to the PPFA/PFA but their non-implementation by Parliament, the political parties interviewed maintained compliance with the prescribed disclosure threshold, donations cap and reporting obligations to the IEC. Several interrelated factors appear to have contributed to this continued compliance. Reasons cited include interventions (in the form of advice) by both the IEC and MVC, legal caution, institutional inertia, administrative habit, and a broader commitment to transparency and accountability, albeit with varying degrees of sincerity and strategic considerations.

A key reason cited for compliance was the awareness of the pending litigation by My Vote Counts (MVC), which created an expectation that the legal gap created in the PFA by the EMAA would soon be closed. As R2 explained:

"There was a request by the IEC directly to parties to continue complying with their declarations. They agreed, probably because they knew that this gap was probably going to be closed because they knew about the litigation by My Vote Counts (MVC)."

The anticipation of a court ruling reinstating the provisions made many parties wary of taking advantage of the temporary gap in the law. R14 (a larger political party) confirmed this perspective, stating, *"We obviously knew from our side that there was an ongoing court case... And the concern would basically be that there could be some retrospective action from the courts."* This concern suggests that some parties opted to maintain compliance to avoid potential legal consequences once the legal uncertainty was resolved. Compare in this regard the views of R16 *"I would assume that most parties regarded the absence of those caps for that short period of time as a technical and temporary gap that shouldn't be taken advantage of."*

However, not all respondents believed that compliance was universal or motivated by a genuine commitment to transparency. Respondent R21 (a smaller political party) was sceptical, asserting, *"No, I don't think they respected it. They made it appear so. But I don't think all of*

them were honest about the total amount of donations that they received [during the existence of the lacuna]." Similarly, R24 (a smaller political party) noted that compliance may have been more about procedural habit than a principled stance: *"For some parties, it was merely a continuation - This is what we've done last term, so let's do it this term as well."* This implies that some parties may have complied out of institutional inertia rather than ethical commitment.

The possibility that political parties may not have fully realised the extent of the regulatory gap and had continued to comply by default, was endorsed by R35 (civic respondent) stated, *"I think the simple answer is that they [parties] probably didn't realise that there was actually no regime in place for a little while."* Similarly, R39 (CSO) indicated that *"It is due to ignorance. They are not aware of the loophole or they want to be on a moral high ground."* In similar vein, the ACDP (R7) said:

"It is encouraging to note that most political parties continue to comply with the disclosure thresholds and donation caps despite not having to do so. This means that there is a buy-in to the need to disclose political party funding. Additionally, they may not have been aware of the changes in the disclosure thresholds. And lastly, maintaining compliance is administratively more efficient at the end of the financial year."

However, a more critical interpretation was also offered, suggesting that some parties might have continued to disclose because they had *"found sufficient means around the Act"* (Naidoo). This hints at the possibility that parties did not view the PFA as a significant constraint in the first place and were content to maintain the status quo of appearing to comply with the Act.

Another factor influencing compliance was the broader public expectation of transparency and accountability. MVC's Bregman (R36) emphasised this point: *"I genuinely believe that most parties and people in parties do understand and value the importance of transparency and accountability in party funding."* It is also suggested that reputational risk played a role, noting that *"it could have really hurt their public image if they were seen to be plundering during this time, when that was never the intention or spirit of the law."* This concern about public perception may have motivated parties to continue disclosing donations despite the temporary regulatory gap.

A few respondents highlighted the role of donors in maintaining compliance. For example, R65 (a donor) explained, *"We continued reporting for the simple reason that (a) we support the principle; we think it's a fair principle; and (b) we thought it might well be that the courts might order, retrospectively, continued application of the law"*. This suggests that donors also played a role in sustaining the norm of disclosure, either out of ethical commitment or prudence regarding possible future legal rulings. Similarly, R64 (a donor) viewed continued compliance as *"a sign of credibility and trust in a system and something that we need to build on"*.

There was also a degree of strategic calculation involved. R53 (media respondent) suggested that parties continued compliance because, *"they know if they stop doing it then it would be very difficult for them to provide that information [retrospectively]"*. This response implies that maintaining consistent reporting was seen as a way to avoid potential complications should the legal requirements be reinstated.

Other respondents noted that while compliance continued, it was not necessarily comprehensive or fully transparent. Respondent R42 (academic) expressed scepticism, arguing that *"sometimes they are probably only reporting on the tip of the iceberg"*. Similarly, R67 (a donor) speculated that *"institutional inertia may have saved the day for at least some of them,"* suggesting that while some parties might have exploited the legal gap, others simply continued with established practices without deeper reflection on the regulatory changes.

The continued compliance by political parties was confirmed by an IEC official (R1) who added that the IEC had contributed to this behaviour trend:

"Despite legal uncertainty after the removal of disclosure thresholds and donation caps by Parliament [in the EMAA amendments to the PFA], most political parties continued to comply with these and their reporting obligations, partly due to the IEC appealing to represented political parties through the Political Liaison Committee to disclose donations above the threshold even when not legally obligated."

Political parties' therefore continued compliance with disclosure thresholds and reporting obligations during the period of legal uncertainty and it appears to have been driven by a combination of reasons which include legal caution, procedural habit, donor expectations, reputational considerations, and, in some cases, genuine commitment to transparency. However, the extent to which this compliance reflected full and honest disclosure remains open to question as indicated by some respondents who suggested that parties may have merely maintained appearances rather than fully adhering to the spirit of the law.

5.9. Private donations: Should the threshold and cap be changed?

This theme and question analyse the appropriateness of the current financial threshold and cap. The question generated a range of responses among stakeholders interviewed, with some advocating for reductions, others for increases, and some maintaining that the current figures are either justifiable or require further evidence-based review.

R64 (a donor) commented that while political parties have long debated funding models and may have had opposing opinions, no viable alternatives to the IEC's current approach have been

proposed. Concerns were raised by a donor (R65) regarding donation reporting, as disclosure thresholds are often debated more extensively within political parties than directly with donors.

R17 a political party participant emphasised in this regard an overarching perspective that *"Parliament should review how they are funding [political parties]. The resources are not sufficient"*.

Among those who support a reassessment of the threshold and caps, there is concern that the then-existing figures in the PPFA⁵⁰ were arbitrarily determined without sufficient empirical justification. As Bregman (R36) argued:

"It's irrational how the existing limits were reached, especially the cap. There was no evidence, it was irrational. We now know that the Parliament Budget Office couldn't provide any evidence of how they'd landed up at that number."

Bregman further emphasised that South Africa's unique constitutional and transparency framework should guide the determination of these thresholds rather than international comparisons. *"You can't just, and the judges said this as well, cherry-pick from other places and impose it here and think that's then an acceptable amount."* This perspective suggests that a more localised and evidence-based approach is necessary to determine appropriate limits.

Similarly, R53 (media respondent) argued for full transparency, stating, *"Well, to fulfil the objectives of the Act, there should actually be full disclosure. So, I'm 100% behind the My Vote Counts current legal challenge to say that all donations should be listed."* This view aligns with R64 (donor), who contends that *"If transparency is the goal, there should be no lower or upper limits. That said, lower thresholds may reduce administrative burdens, but that's more of a capacity issue than a transparency issue."* Arguments by these two respondents suggest that the principle of transparency should override any concerns about administrative burden complexity. It may be worth noting that, with automated electronic banking records, identifying and disclosing all donations is a relatively less complicated and onerous process than it may once have been.

On the other hand, some respondents argued that the current limits serve a necessary purpose in balancing transparency with political financing realities. R14 (larger political party) emphasised the high costs associated with political campaigns, stating that even the R15 million annual donation cap *"is not going to materially impact in terms of your policy or impact what you are going to do."* However, this perspective also suggests that reducing the cap could limit parties' ability to run effective pre-election campaigns without significantly mitigating undue

⁵⁰ That is, a donation disclosure threshold of R100 000 and an annual donation cap from a single donor of R15 million.

influence. R14 also warned that lowering disclosure thresholds could have unintended consequences for democracy, stating, *"If the mandate continues the way that it is, and if thresholds and disclosure limits get tightened up, it is actually going to be bad for democracy."* They argued that excessive regulation could squeeze donations to compliant parties, potentially disadvantaging them compared to parties not 100 per cent fully compliant. This raises questions about the balance between transparency and the practical realities of political financing.

A civil society representative (R39) felt that the disclosure threshold should be increased, adding that *"More money is needed, there is not enough political funding. Not sure if the 15 million is okay or should be higher but the 100 thousand can go up. A party cannot be bought with 100 thousand. The money can be adjusted up annually to keep up with inflation. 100 thousand today is not the same as 5 years ago."*

The ACDP (R7) also noted that:

"The donation threshold should be increased, as donors often prefer to remain anonymous. Raising these limits would encourage individuals to contribute more while maintaining their anonymity, which will contribute to multi-party democracy in the country. We appreciate that this must be balanced against the need for transparency and accountability of private donations to parties to avoid undue influence and conflicts of interest."

Conversely, R24 (another smaller political party) adopted the opposite stance, advocating for a lower threshold:

"I think we're one of the few political parties saying that it should be decreased. But the problem is that on local government level, we've heard horrific stories of political parties where councillors received very little in donations to do questionable things. The R100,000 threshold is for when your name is publicised, and people can see who made the donation. That amount should be lowered so that more people can see who the donors are."

This perspective suggests that lowering the threshold could enhance accountability, particularly at the local government level where smaller donations may still have a significant and undue impact on decision-making by the recipient political party once elected.

R16 is also in favour of a lower threshold and cap. This political party participant indicated:

"I think that both the threshold and the cap is too high. They should be decreased. In fact, I think that we need a different model for political party funding. I think it's obscene in a country with so much deprivation and poverty that wealthy donors and large businesses are maxing out their donations of R15 million to a single political party. If you want to

invest in democracy, you [should] invest in the multi-party democracy fund. Or if you want to invest in South Africa's future, you can invest directly in communities that are absolutely devastated by poverty. So, I think the threshold for disclosure and the cap is far too high. We need a complete overhaul of political party funding."

A more nuanced approach is presented by CASAC's Naidoo (R35) who suggested that the disclosure threshold and cap should be linked to the financial 'size' of the political party:

"One has to look at that question from the perspective of the voter because R100,000 to the ANC is minuscule compared to what R100,000 might mean for a very small party. Perhaps we should set the threshold and cap as being a percentage of that party's income for the previous financial year?"

This proposal seeks to address the disproportionate influence that donations of the same amount may have on different-sized political entities.

The uncertainty surrounding the current limits was acknowledged by R42 (an academic), who pointed out that financial conditions fluctuate and thus thresholds may need periodic adjustments: *"I agree with the general line, but I believe over time there will be a need to change this according to financial and other realities."*

While R21 (a smaller political party) did not explicitly call for changes, they highlighted a practical issue with the R100,000 disclosure threshold, arguing that cumulative donations should not trigger disclosure requirements:

"I think the R100,000 limit is a bit tricky. For example, if someone gives R10,000 a month, that adds up to R120,000 after 12 months. In month 11, that would trigger the donation [threshold] and require a declaration."

This suggests a need for refinement in the way thresholds are structured to avoid unintended administrative complications. An IEC official (R1) also recognised that as implementers and administrators of the PFA, the IEC would rather reserve their comments regarding the appropriateness of the current thresholds for disclosure of private donations (R100 000) and annual cap on donations from a single source (R15 million). This is because the IEC consider themselves less experienced on the costs involved in running a political office.

Overall, the debate over whether the current threshold and caps should be increased, decreased, or maintained hinges on different perspectives regarding transparency, administrative feasibility, and the role of private funding in shaping political outcomes. While some respondents argued for full transparency or lower limits to mitigate undue influence, others highlighted the practical financial needs of political parties with particular reference to

election campaigns, and therefore suggesting that any changes should be based on empirical evidence rather than just arbitrary decision-making.

5.10. Regulatory regime: An income and/or an expenditure focus?

This theme and accompanying question examine which monitoring approach - income or expenditure - most effectively promotes funding transparency and accountability. As alluded to in the question to respondents, South Africa's current political funding regulatory regime primarily focuses on monitoring income, specifically donations to political parties and independent candidates. Other countries have adopted an approach that either monitors expenditure or places a limit on it.

An analysis of responses showed that some respondents support an expenditure-based system or, in some instances, a combination of both. With the combination proposal, it is argued that this may better serve the objectives of funding transparency and accountability. However, perspectives from respondents vary, reflecting concerns about administrative feasibility, reporting accuracy, and the risk of non-disclosure. Several respondents highlighted the shortcomings of the current income-based approach, noting that political parties may circumvent disclosure requirements. As R14 (a larger political party) respondent observed, *"...what's happening is that either a lot of political parties just aren't declaring donations, or they're moving what they're receiving into 'income'."* The respondent further describes a practice where political fundraising events such as gala dinners disguise donations as income:

"A lot of these political parties have these fancy dinners or golf days... you can be paying in the region of five to 15 million Rand. And effectively, you're buying a ticket to sit at that table, so that's classified as income, and therefore it's not publicly disclosed."

This sentiment was echoed by R21 (a smaller political party), who stated, *"I would say a more reasonable yardstick to measure would be the expenditure because I don't think the income is all being reported."* The concern about undisclosed income suggests that an income-based system alone may be insufficient to ensure transparency. Similarly, Bregman argued that both income and expenditure should be monitored: *"Knowing what parties spend their money on, knowing what types of businesses they are spending their money on, and understanding those connections is an important part of the calculus when trying to understand the whole party funding picture."*

Despite these concerns, some respondents caution against an immediate shift to an expenditure-based model. R24 (smaller political party) argues that *"we are now only getting to an income-based system where you declare your income. I don't think we're ready yet for an outcome-based or expenditure-based approach."* Likewise, Naidoo (R35) shared insights from a study tour to the UK with the IEC, noting that while *"the focus was much more on the*

expenditure side rather than the income side,” the administrative burden was significant. They warn that shifting to an expenditure-focused model too soon “may just cause confusion and frustration” and that “the main political parties in the UK responded in exactly the same way—that the administrative burden is so high in terms of keeping track of every bit of expenditure.” Similarly, R39 from a CSO argued that *“Income-based is okay, otherwise it would be interfering with the independence of the parties. If they want higher regulation, then state funding should be higher. The bigger parties said state funding accounts for less than 50%”*. A similar sentiment was expressed by another political party participant (R16):

“I think that the focus on the income - who the donors are - is better for political transparency and accountability because parties contest elections ultimately to be elected into government. When they're in government, it's more important to be able to see who funded that party to make sure that donor is not receiving any special treatment or kickbacks from a party that now has access to the levers of power.”

The academic (R42) acknowledged that *“the expenditure-based approach is going to be the more accurate,”* but warned of its complexity: *“it’s going to be a lot more difficult and more problematic to implement.”* Similarly, R64 (donor) expresses a preference for income monitoring, stating, *“tracking income (donations received) is more straightforward than tracking how funds are spent.”*

The expenditure-based model approach is also supported by the IEC official (R1) who believes that an expenditure-based approach is more uniform because it would cap campaign expenditure for all political parties and independent candidates. It is also perceived as fairer as it focuses on expenditure rather than the amount of income received, potentially addressing the current scheme's perceived favour towards represented political parties. Furthermore, R1 also highlights that the expenditure-based method may be easier to audit.

At the same time, some respondents advocate for a hybrid model that integrates both income and expenditure monitoring. For example, R17 from a smaller political party suggested *“Either is okay because you budget for what you want to achieve”*. R2 also suggested that *“Maybe a combination of both would be useful... I think a combination of two would be a much more comprehensive approach and more reliable in detecting any dishonesty.”* Furthermore, media respondent R53 argued that South Africa should adhere to the African Commission’s guidelines, stating, *“It clearly states that both those sets of information should be included.”* R67 (donor) adds that *“There is no complete solution,”* but suggested mechanisms such as a public register of beneficial ownership or cryptocurrency-based donations to enhance transparency.

“I would argue for a combination of both. Like I indicated, we monitor compliance in terms of income received by the political party but if there is a disjuncture between what

is declared as income and an expenditure, we can institute an investigation if we think there is no congruence between the two. Whilst the focus is on the income with us, either us or another person can look at the expenditure and say, can you investigate. So, I think our is a very balanced approach" (R4).

Valli Moosa (R25) observed that different regulatory goals are at stake in the two approaches. The first targets income transparency, which empowers voters and prevents undue foreign or domestic influence. The second is that expenditure regulation ensures a level playing field and avoids wealthy parties buying influence through massive campaigns. While South Africa has not yet faced 'extreme' campaign spending, unlike the U.S., he thought that pre-emptive regulation may be worth considering before it becomes a problem:

"No, I think the two serve completely different purposes. Being transparent and reporting on income primarily empower the voters to know who they're voting for. So, if you are being funded by Pick n Pay [for example], which gives you all your money, or gives you a large portion of your funding, the voters should be able to ask whether there's anything wrong with that. So it's to empower the voters, firstly, and secondly, to prevent big money capturing our politics and our political parties, of course, and prevent foreigners from running our politics for us and those sorts of things. On the question of spending, expenditure, I think that's a different question altogether. That is about how much advantage should a political party have? Because it has lots and lots of money, could it be like, you know, the United States, where television advertising influences the voters a lot. Not so much in our case, but in the United States, it influences voters. ... Television advertising is very expensive, and to level the playing field, it makes sense to talk about a limit to how much you can spend on television advertising. You know, to limit that. So, I think it fulfils a different need altogether.

Should you be allowed to spend an inordinate amount of money on your campaign as a whole? Or should there be some sort of cap on that? It's a question that hasn't arisen so far from any of the political parties, and it hasn't arisen in our discussion, in a general public discussion on party funding up to now in South Africa. So, I would say that for us, it's a new area that should not be ignored, but a lot more thinking has to go into it, about placing limits on how much a party can spend. I think that, partly, the question hasn't really arisen because we don't have any of the parties having an almost inexhaustible supply of money. Because, you know, if you have an inexhaustible supply of money, you can incentivise people. You could find ways of bribing voters. But nobody has said we've got that problem [at the moment], but I think for the sake of the future, it's something worth giving thought to, because sometimes it's easier to regulate a matter like that [at a time] when it isn't [yet a contentious] issue. Should we say, for example, that no party may spend more than R10 billion on any election campaign? Now, no party currently spends - even those that are cheating with reporting - anywhere close to that. It may be easy for parties to agree to that type of thing now and maybe in 10 years' time that will help our democracy in some way. It may be not a bad idea

to start thinking about it when parties wouldn't be threatened by it because no party would feel it's going to affect them [in the near future]."

While South Africa's current income-based system provides a foundation for political funding transparency, its limitations, such as undisclosed income and the risk of circumvention, suggest that an expenditure-based or hybrid model may have merit and may enhance accountability. However, as many respondents noted, implementing an expenditure-based approach would require significant administrative adjustments and may not be immediately feasible due to the administrative burden and associated costs, particularly for smaller political parties. A gradual transition towards incorporating expenditure monitoring may therefore be more feasible as this will strengthen current income disclosure mechanisms and may be the most practical approach to balance democratic values of transparency and accountability in political funding. In the meantime, it remains open to the Commission to take appropriate note of large expenditures incurred in plain sight that don't neatly correlate with donations disclosed.

5.11. Do the benefits of private funding outweigh the risks?

Perceptions of public versus private political funding are examined by this theme and question, assessing whether the benefits of private funding outweigh the risks posed. The impact and implications of direct private funding of political parties and independent candidates on electoral democracy remains a highly contested topic. Perspectives among respondents varied widely, with some arguing that private funding is essential for democratic political competition, while others warned of undue influence and corruption risks. It is highlighted that the challenge lies in balancing these competing interests to ensure that South Africa's democratic system is both competitive and transparent.

There is a fundamental concern that state funding of political parties can entrench the power of incumbents. As R2 explained:

"If parties are funded publicly, then there's very little influence by private entities and wealthy individuals. Elsewhere in the world, and particularly in most African countries, there is a view that if the state funds political parties, the party in government will never lose an election because they have a great deal of influence and will always fund their party according to what it needs."

This underscores the risk that public funding could be manipulated to maintain political dominance. However, R67 (donor) cautioned against excessive reliance on public funding, observing that:

"when an incumbent party is struggling in the opinion polls and losing their market appeal, it's too easy to just say, well, let's not worry about our market appeal, we can turn on the [public funding] taps through our majorities in a particular legislature."

On the other hand, direct private funding is seen as an important mechanism for enabling new and smaller parties to compete. For instance, R17 from a political party indicated that *"The political funding is trying to level the playing field. Everyone needs to feel equal and taken care of."* R14 (a larger political party) maintained that *"if you're a smaller party coming onto the scene and you're a newer party, there's absolutely no doubt that direct private funding makes a substantial contribution to electoral democracy."* Similarly, Joel Bregman (R36) pointed out that without private funding, new entrants would disappear entirely and asserted, *"So I think, obviously in full recognition of the risks, I think private funding is an important part of the party funding mix."* A CSO (R39) also felt that private funding is not a bad thing. This CSO participant emphasised that:

"We need to get rid of the notion that money in politics is bad. If they don't get money, it leads to corrupt ways of finding money. Campaigns are expensive, it costs money to do empirical research and test policies. 1 billion will not buy a party, but an individual getting 1 million is more sustainable because it can change their life."

Yet, the risks of private funding are significant. R42 (academic) stated, *"As the saying goes, there's no free lunch. So, in that sense, I think it is problematic, but it's a danger you need to manage in some way."* R16 also highlighted the risk of private funding. This political party participant indicated:

"I think the party-political funding regime needs a complete overhaul. I think there is evidence and clear risks of private funding resulting in undue influence of political parties that end up in government. There's no rational basis in my mind for a wealthy individual or a business to donate R15 million to one political party."

The concern that private donations could lead to undue influence was echoed by R64 (donor), who warned that *"the risk of undue influence is real. A system like the IEC's [Multi-Party Democracy Fund], where funds go through a neutral channel rather than directly to parties, is a good model. It strengthens democracy rather than individual parties."*

From the responses, transparency emerged as a crucial factor in mitigating admitted risks. R53 (media respondent) emphasised that *"it's only if there's ... transparency about party funding that the system will properly work - if you know about all the different monies that they receive from different sources."* Similarly, MVC's Joel Bregman (R35) argued that *"if private money is banned, it'll go further underground and out of sight. We should rather focus our efforts on ensuring that we improve transparency and compliance and tighten regulations."*

5.12. A more attractive and effective Multiparty Democracy Fund?

One proposed solution is routing private funding through independent mechanisms. R2 highlighted the potential of the Multi-Party Democracy Fund (MPDF), describing it as:

"a very progressive fund that has an equalising effect. The private sector and individuals can still lend a hand to resource politics, but in a manner that is more transparent, independently managed, and so forth. One may want to argue that this method of private funding should maybe be considered above other methods of private funding" (R2).

R16, from a political party, also supported the MPDF who emphasised that:

"If we were to ever have the courage as a country - because the IEC can do this research, but unless the politicians buy into it, we're not going to really see a change in our political party funding regime - but if we have the courage to do so, I think the only place that private political donations should be received is the Multi-Party Democracy Fund."

Similarly, R39 (CSO) stated that MPDF *"is relevant. They do still get some money. If it was better marketed it would attract more money. It is also good for those that do not want to give to a specific party because of not wanting to appear as influencing the party"*.

An alternative approach proposed could involve a hybrid funding system that balances public and private contributions. A donor Paul Graham (R67) suggested a:

"matching" system, proposing that "public and private funding are linked, so that there's a 'Rand for Rand', or a 'Rand for a cent' formula, as opposed to our current formula [of 90/10]. A 'matching' system creates an incentive to raise funds from the public... It may be worth playing with incentives, rather than disincentives, when developing this system."

One respondent (R1) supported such a hybrid approach by suggesting that private donations be welcomed since state resources may not be sufficient, especially with the country's persistent stagnant economic growth. R1 further stated that *"political parties and independent representatives must be funded to strengthen electoral democracy"* and reasoned that *"a weaker democracy leads to a weaker platform for business to thrive"*. This respondent sees a hybrid approach as creating *"some element of balance"* between the risks and benefits of private funding.

The MPDF is slowly gaining traction, but it seems that the IEC has only recently started awareness campaigns about it around the country. Both old and new political parties were not keen to engage on it when they were invited for interviews. One of the newest political parties even politely declined to participate stating that they are too new to have something to say

about either the PFA or the MPDF (R12). Even some IEC officials conceded that not much awareness has been raised about the Fund:

“No, I think, as a Commission, we haven't done enough in terms of publicising the framework for party funding. And I think if we had to run a specific campaign around educating on the party funding framework in this country, there'll be much more voluntary participation in this process by stakeholders. I think we haven't done enough as an institution. ... [T]here's always competing interests [i.e., priorities] around this matter, but on the Multi-Party Democracy Fund specifically, [this] is the first time we even have adverts running around encouraging the public and the private sector to contribute into the Fund. And I'm sure if you can go to the private sector and ask them the difference between direct party funding and the Multi-Party Democracy Fund, they would not know the difference. Yeah. So, I think the Commission can really do better in being very proactive around publicising the party funding framework and helping even donors understand the difference between the two” (R4).

“The Commission has taken a view that part of the reason that the MPDF hasn't been used much so far, is its low profile – there isn't much public awareness of it. So, the Commission is currently undertaking an advertising campaign to raise awareness of the PFA and especially the MPDF. The advertising campaign includes an invitation to donate to the MPDF. The IEC will assess its success – whether donations start flowing into the Fund. ... The IEC and the MPDF need more visibility. The MPDF should be seen as an advocate for public will and democracy, not just another bureaucratic entity. Strengthening public trust in these institutions is critical.” (R2).

Whilst this has been true, one respondent (R64) cautioned the IEC about the need to preserve its reputation for impartiality lest it is viewed as a fundraiser:

“Awareness campaigns could help. However, the IEC must avoid positioning itself as a fundraiser, as this could create perception issues” (R64).

R39 (CSO) also indicated that the MDPF is *“not effectively communicated. There is ignorance in the community to its existence”*. This respondent suggested two other reasons why the MPDF hasn't attracted much interest to date. *“When people give money, they also want to be recognised by the people they're giving money to, but that does not mean they are corrupt or want contracts.”* The respondent appears to be proposing that donors should receive some public recognition for their support for democracy. A third reason proposed was that a donor may not make a contribution to the MPDF because their donation is shared among all represented political parties, whereas *“... a company may not agree with party ABC, so they would rather give to those who share the company's ideals.”*

These challenges with the Fund's design are acknowledged, especially that potential contributors could be put off by the fact that their less preferred political players would be beneficiaries of donations to the Fund due to the Fund's distribution formula. However, one respondent believes that the MPDF does have a role to play in South Africa's political funding architecture and is relevant, particularly for corporates such as banks and telecommunications companies that serve all citizens regardless of affiliation and may want to support democracy without favouring a specific party.

Despite the criticisms of the MDPF, one respondent believes that it should be recognised for levelling the field between the older, bigger parties and newer, smaller parties:

"I actually don't know, because when they started running this campaign on the Multi-Party Democracy Fund, the question was 'What took you so long?'. Because, I mean, ... there are people who want to see democracy thriving in this country. Yes, and they'll be more than happy to contribute into the Fund because they know it is going to assist the smaller parties in particular that are always overlooked when it comes to funding. I don't think we've seen it as a priority until now, because we are realising [that] inasmuch as we can show something on direct party funding, but we actually have not much to show on the Multi-Party Democracy Fund. As a result, especially this year, we have seen an effort by the Commission to want to attract the private sector to donate into the Multi-Party Fund, and then [it will be seen that] the IEC ... was implementing the Act [i.e., the PFA, properly]" (R4).

"There are parties that would otherwise [not] get any funding from anyone except the funds that they generate themselves through membership [fees] and fundraising activities. But they will never really [raise much], especially new parties. I mean, if you are new and you have demonstrated [that you] have support, you are equally qualified to get funding as parties that have been there all along, especially if you have demonstrated that you could even get more support than those parties. So, a multi-party fund ensures, once you have demonstrated that you do enjoy [voters'] support, and when you were able to get even one seat, [which requires] over 50,000 votes at the national level, you have demonstrated that you have support. So, this Fund ensures that you are compensated for the support you have demonstrated" (R4).

"The Fund may be relevant to the way the state can say, OK, we are funding this in order to promote a multi-party democracy. And if a party qualifies in terms of certain criteria, and it's a new party, we will help and support them. Then the ideal is not to as much benefit one party above the other, but to give them a start" (R49).

However, the Fund has attracted very little interest from donors, with comparatively far fewer and smaller donations than to even new political parties or independent candidates. Instead of making a donation to the Fund, for example, some donors have chosen to make donations directly to more than one political party or independent candidate (R4).

To make the fund more attractive, some respondents have supported offering tax incentives:

“[T]he possibility of tax-deductible donations to the MPDF must be explored. There must be an incentive to donate to the Fund compared to direct donations to individual parties” (R2).

“It would obviously be instrumental to the Fund if donations to it were to be tax deductible” (Fynbos Ekwiteit).

R39 also believes that donors *“need to be convinced. Explain why and how it is important for them. It can also count towards tax deductions, some countries have that”*.

Moreover, if there was a fund to which one could donate to support the IEC, *“then that's something that we would consider because we think it's disgraceful if the government is not prepared to fund free elections. If the IEC doesn't have enough money, it's something we would consider. Constitutional bodies should be exempted from budget cuts”* (Fynbos Ekwiteit).

Ultimately, private funding is regarded as a double-edged sword. It fosters competition, political diversity and opportunities for renewal through the entry of new political parties, but it also carries the risk of undue influence. Effective regulation, increased transparency, and innovative funding mechanisms such as the MPDF or systems to match private and public funding may offer a way to harness the benefits of private funding while mitigating its associated risks. The right to make a donation to a political party is also closely associated with the constitutional rights to freedom of association and freedom of expression. The primary challenge remains to ensure a democratic funding model that creates some element of balance that prevents entrenched power while allowing political newcomers an equal and fair chance to compete.

5.13. Political funding and gender parity: Enhancing women's representation in South Africa

Despite the growing recognition of the need for gender equality in politics, women's political representation remains significantly lower than men's, with women holding only a small fraction of parliamentary and ministerial positions globally. This underrepresentation is driven by a range of structural barriers, including entrenched gender norms, limited access to financial resources, and societal expectations that constrain women's political involvement. While quotas and affirmative action policies have made some strides in improving gender parity, the unequal distribution of political funding continues to undermine true gender equality in political spaces.

These dynamics highlight the intersection between political funding and gender representation, where financial barriers, often exacerbated by gendered stereotypes and discrimination, create significant challenges for women in accessing the necessary resources to run successful political campaigns.

In the South African context, understanding the role of financial support in shaping women's political participation is vital for addressing the gender disparities that persist within the country's political system. Despite significant progress in promoting gender equality, such as the introduction of gender quotas in the African National Congress, for example, and the establishment of a relatively high percentage of women in Parliament, financial barriers continue to hinder women's full political participation. Women in South Africa, particularly those from marginalised communities, often lack access to the necessary resources, networks, and donor support that would allow them to effectively campaign and compete in elections. These challenges are compounded by traditional gender norms and the male-dominated political environment, which limit women's influence and visibility in high-profile political positions. Without targeted financial support and gender-responsive political funding mechanisms, women may struggle to overcome these structural barriers, perpetuating a cycle of underrepresentation. Thus, addressing the intersection of financial resources and gender equality is essential to creating a more inclusive political landscape in South Africa, where women can have equal opportunities to influence policy and governance.

5.13.1 Do gender considerations affect how political parties distribute their funding?

Since 1994, South Africa has made significant strides in women's political representation, with women consistently holding over 40% of seats in the National Assembly, due in part to the ANC's adoption of gender quotas and the zebra-stripe approach. However, despite these achievements, women still face substantial barriers in the political sphere, including financial disadvantages, which hinder their full participation and leadership in key roles in political leadership. In this context, in exploring whether political funding can be a tool for transformative politics for gender parity, key informants (i.e., respondents/interviewees) were not very optimistic. This is because, as R39 (CSO) highlighted:

"It's not my impression. I have never had any sense that that gender considerations are part of it...I've never, I don't want to say taken a note of, but in anything I've read or listened to it, that gender considerations is something that I've heard of spoken from that sector [i.e., political parties]."

Political parties do not necessarily talk gender when they distribute political funding for candidates and campaigns. Indeed, as R39 observed:

"No, it's not surprising because I mean to, to your point, it reflects the kind of overarching norms. You know, gender is its own layer of the politics and it's not, it's not articulated in spaces that are talking money...Quite frankly, it's because I think that a lot of the narrative around gender, the politics around gender is not...backed up by intention or transformation....Is the 'wait it's there', then it will automatically filter not just to policy but also into the money conversations because we understand politics happens with money generally."

The question of gender norms is thus crucial to consider when engaging in reflections on political funding and gender parity. To this effect, another key informant noted that it challenging to engage on political funding and gender parity because "...remember ... you're not dealing with anything. You're dealing with traditional structures. I mean, predominantly we understand how, you know, political parties are structured, I think from a gender perspective" (R5). To this effect, when looking at whether political parties consider gender in distribute political funding, R21 commented:

"I think the saying 'it's a man's world' still very much applies in this day and age. Even though we're supposed to be living in a society that's trying to root out patriarchy. But I do feel that women need to prove themselves and work harder for a position of authority, such as an electoral candidate position".

Indeed, this gendered view and the gendered difference in access to time resources, financial barriers, and other gendered obstacles that impact on female representation is not necessarily 'seen' or recognised by some political parties. Indeed, here one party stated that gender is a "...non-issue...gender is not a consideration" (R14).

The discussions on whether gender should be considered when distributing political funding provides a picture of contradictions. On the one hand, there is the political rhetoric around gender equality, but on the other hand, there is limited recognition of gender as a factor in party leadership and considerations around funding. For some political parties, gender was not a consideration, highlighting that merit is central to accessing financial resources and financial decision-making. Constructing gender as a "...non-issue..." implies that some political parties do not see gender equality as a financial priority. There was limited engagement with quotas or the need for increased women's representation in the political system. Gender roles and traditions were acknowledged as an influencing factor in how political parties handle the question of gender and gender equality in funding decisions. There was a sense of lack of transparency regarding how political funding is distributed internally, and that private donors may be more concerned about organisational logistics as opposed to values like gender equality. As one private donor noted, "we haven't seen [the issue] ... as a corporate donor. A lot of the time the

conversations that we have been to be about the organisation and the running of the party” (R64).

Given the lack of transparency around how funding is allocated and distributed internally, respondents highlighted that they have a lack of information in this regard. It is therefore difficult to assess the level of gendered budgeting in how political party funding is allocated internally in support of achieving gender parity. Political parties are not obliged to disclose how funding is distributed and to what extent gender parity is supported through internal political funding mechanisms.

5.13.2 Do political parties treat male and female electoral candidates differently when allocating funds?

The responses around questions on whether political parties treat male and female candidates differently raises several contradictions around merit vis gender parity, gender inequality, and how political parties approach questions of gender parity and political financing. It is interesting to note that the conversations around political funding to advance political gender parity and women’s representation seem to be lacking in the broader discourse around gender considerations and political finance, and access to positions and power. Indeed, some role players’ gender considerations are in the realm of other political parties that need to be more sensitive to “...feminists within their parties...” (R24, political party representative). Similarly, R7, a representative from a smaller party, stated:

"There is no evidence or research that we know of that suggests that gender consideration plays a role in the distributing of funds...Funding has got nothing to do with the number of women on party lists. We, however, do think that the violent and intolerant nature of politics in certain areas can play a role in discouraging women to participate...In our view, it will be unfair to use political funding for such purposes, particularly to require equal gender representation, as parties should be left to determine their own lists" (R7).

There was a strong advocacy around merit-based approaches in allocating funds, meaning that gender considerations are secondary to constructed competence and excellence. Gender parity is therefore not a consideration, and, despite claims of merit-based performance, the data also highlights the ongoing influence of patriarchal norms, suggesting that women must work harder to earn positions of authority and electoral candidacies. Gender biases therefore, still colour political funding, albeit perhaps in more subtle forms, where women face additional barriers or expectations compared to their male counterparts.

Some respondents also noted shifts in gender parity, noting the slight decrease in the proportion of women in Parliament. As alluded to earlier, this could be correlated with the decline of the ANC's majority, a party that had a strong policy of gender parity in its approach to political representation. Here, MVC's Joel Bregman (R36) observed:

"I think we can actually see, it's not dramatic, but we can see a small shift in gender parity in South Africa and politics at the moment. In 2020, 46% of South Africa's parliamentarians were women. This has now since dropped to 43%, which isn't enormous, but it's still a drop and I think it could be due to the fact that now in the GNU you have parties such as the DA and IFP who don't use the zebra stripe rule like the ANC does. And in cabinet now only 40% of positions are held by women."

Inconsistency in political parties applying gender parity measures such as the 'zebra stripe' approach (i.e., male-female alternation or equality on the party list), may have negatively impacted women's representation in the country. Similarly, the lack of transparency on funding allocation and gender parity creates uncertainty and may work to uphold gendered structures that inadvertently exclude women, who often face higher expectations to prove themselves. There may therefore be a need for more structured regulations around gender parity and political funding to advance gender equality and women's representation (R5).

5.13.3 Do private or corporate donations negatively influence the number of women on political parties' candidates lists?

This question proved difficult given the lack of standardised policy positions on gender parity among political parties. Respondents noted that it is difficult to determine the influence of private donations on gender parity and whether this is directly correlated with the number of women on the political candidates list. This relates again to questions of transparency in that political parties do not necessarily disclose how they use donations in advancing gender parity and women's representation. Therefore, it is challenging to determine whether these donations have any impact on strengthening women's participation in the country.

"It's so difficult to determine, because the party will determine who the political candidates are. And like I say, I mean, if the general public identify with that particular candidate, or if that candidate is able to lobby the people, then I don't think it should make a difference whether the candidate is a male or female" (R21).

Gender parity considerations may therefore not play an obvious role in private donations and political backing for political parties. These dynamics are linked to strategic relationships and loyalty, and not necessarily gender, suggesting that the political nature of party decisions could

be a more influential factor than donations themselves. It is the absence of information that makes funding allocation for gender empowerment difficult to assess. It also limits any form of study on whether private funding donations can positively or negatively influence gender parity and women's representation through influencing the gender balance on a political party's list.

5.13.4 How important is gender-sensitive budgeting in political campaigns?

There is a significant divide in gender-budgeting among political parties. Some see it as inconsequential, advocating for merit-based approaches where gender does not matter. Others acknowledge specific gendered challenges like unpaid care work and the need for additional resources in launching a political campaign. Here, respondents showed an understanding that gender-sensitive budgeting may be more important for campaigns targeting women or gender-focused issues. The lack of consensus indicates that gender-sensitive budgeting is seen as context-dependent, being more relevant to campaigns where gender is a central focus. However, the necessity for gender-budgeting cannot be underestimated. As one respondent noted:

"But if those resources could just be put in one basket and in the process recognise the fact that women are not starting [on] the same footing as men, and therefore, be deliberate in terms of ensuring that you put together reforms that are going to actually push women so that they can be at the same level as whatever initiative that is going to be done, you know, by their male counterparts. So, these are the things that we would want to see from political parties, you know, because they are in the influencers of change, they are the drivers of change. So, if it's going to start, that's the way it's going to start ... You know, allocation of resources is something that we need to see ... as an outcome of that responsive gender budgeting and how best you do that ... No, I think it is quite critical. I think it's one of the things which ... is still to be implemented, but certainly, there should be a policy around gender-responsive planning and budgeting" (R5).

MVC's Joel Bregman commented:

"On gender sensitivity in budgeting and political campaigns, I think there's an important point here that women face additional responsibilities and other barriers and burdens related to childcare, such as for women who are nursing or who have young families. Their responsibilities and what they would require to be in the political space would be quite different to those of a man. Women generally have less access to financial resources and smaller, less powerful social and professional networks than men. They have greater difficulty establishing an early presence when running for candidacy, and this can impact their ability to attract equivalent or greater funding. In the U.S. these initial costs are

referred to as 'early money', and there's a political action committee called Emily's List which specifically fundraises early money for female Democrat candidates to kickstart their campaigns" (R36).

Women face additional barriers when launching a political campaign, including around gender norms and roles that shape how they should 'show up' (i.e., their appearance) and behave in society. Women in politics carry unpaid care work burdens as well as having the need to prove their merit and competence in holding political office and other key political positions. In addition, one may also find women facing sexual violence and/or sexual exploitation in advancing their political careers. A CSO representative (R39) explained:

"...we did a campaign just looking at different political parties' responses to harassment, sexual violence within the party or by party members to the public. And this issue of "sex for jobs, sex to keep your job" within political parties is massive. And the cover ups - profound. The only times we were noting that a politician wouldn't be protected by the party was when that politician was already on the way out. So, when the party was already trying to get rid of [someone], then suddenly sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, sexual violence are raised as the reasons. But typically, if you look at the cases that are raised typically, what we saw was that those men are completely protected by the party. She's always lying.... It's like a common thread, and not just my experience as a woman who maybe [has] a constituency in whatever area. I am at risk when I'm travelling to and from my constituency. That's just one layer of it. The other layer is [that] once I'm sitting at the table at the party, I've got to behave in a certain way and I've got to put up with certain high degree of harassment. Yeah, and the disrespect because I'm a woman."

There is a need to recognise the systemic culture within political environments that not only undermines a women's safety and physical integrity but also includes hostility and the risk of sexual harassment and violence. Voices are silenced and experiences invalidated. Women also navigate disrespect and harassment in their political career trajectory, which also constitutes a significant barrier in addition to financial obstacles. This, coupled with insufficient financial resources and backing, undermines gender equality in that political structures internal to the culture of the political party may perpetuate gender inequality.

The divide around gender-targeted budgeting seems to be rooted in what can be seen as a reductionist gender-neutral ideology. The political system, in this view, is open to anyone who wants to compete, based on their alignment with the ideology and policy frameworks of the party. From this perspective, gender-sensitive budgeting is thus unnecessary given that political party identity and value take precedence in campaign planning. Political party-targeted

messaging also plays a role in the extent to which political parties may adopt or advocate for gender-sensitive budgeting.

5.13.5 What can be done to encourage political parties to invest more in women-led initiatives and gender-equal policies at all levels?

Public funding and gender parity requires a delicate balance. There is, of course, a human rights and moral obligation to advance gender equality on the one hand. On the other hand, there is also a need to guard against over-regulation, limiting the agency of political parties to spend their resources on policy platforms they choose to adopt and promote. One should also be mindful that there is significant opposition to enforced or legislated gender representation (or gender quotas) among political parties. Indeed, one political party stated:

“Let me be honest - we are totally against the idea of equal gender representation on party candidates lists. So, I think it's not realistic, considering the situation of females in our country, to try and force that down on political parties. What about the Women's Alliance - a party that was all women? So, now you want to force a party whose focus is women's rights to have men on their list?” (R36).

Paul Graham, a donor, cautioned:

“The state interferes with this issue at its peril, I think. I'm all for systems that encourage inclusivity and so on, but if you legislate revenue on that basis, I think you'll be challenged by parties because they will see it as their domain and will feel unfairly discriminated against if they have values which are at odds with the legislation. This response would be justified. For example, imagine the opposite of this proposal - if you say we're going to give money to men. Then an all-woman party would feel perfectly justified in claiming that was discrimination because they wouldn't be able to benefit. That argument could be raised by an Islam-based party, for example, which may feel that it's inappropriate, or if we say we're going to give money for people under 25. And then a party says but we've chosen only to put forward people who are older because we believe in the wisdom of maturity. So, I think it's an area where you really are potentially getting into trouble. I'm a firm believer still in the existing electoral system, and one of the reasons is because it doesn't stop people from putting forward whichever candidates they like, but there is some incentive for those who want to be able to put forward women or minority candidates, whereas in a first-past-the-post system the incentive is that you have to compete with the other party, which is going to dominate otherwise. Then there's almost a built-in incentive towards only particular types of male candidates in that type of system. So, I think the electoral system is a place where you can introduce values without

imposing them, but I'm not sure that you can do that easily here. I may be wrong. There may be ways to do it, but I fear the Constitutional Court might be busy" (R67).

Therefore, a mixed picture emerges regarding the use of public funding for political party gender parity. While some respondents perceive value in using funding to encourage gender equality, others argue that gender-sensitive budgeting should be left to the discretion of the political parties. They emphasise that the voting public should ultimately determine the success of gender representation through their votes and the party's manifesto, not through legislated requirements. Their concern is that such regulations could lead to unintended consequences, like limiting the diversity of candidates or creating legal challenges based on the perceived discrimination against certain parties with different policy platforms. Some respondents suggested that donors, particularly those with more traditional views on leadership, might be less inclined to fund parties with a gender-balanced or female-majority slate. Private funding is, of course, a little more complex in that private donors have freedom of choice, which cannot be undermined through the imposition of conditions on their donations.

5.13.6 Could political funding, possibly including public allocations and / or private donations, be used in ways that advance, encourage or promote other relevant social objectives, such as equal gender representation in parties' candidates lists?

The data demonstrate a systemic tension between a political rhetoric of gender equality versus the adoption and implementation of measures to advance gender parity and women's representation. Some respondents argued that party autonomy should be respected, with parties free to select candidates based on their criteria and ideological alignment. Furthermore, concerns about political and social engineering were raised, with critics arguing that forcing through such regulations could undermine the core values of democracy by limiting voter choice. Others pointed to the possibility of gender-sensitive budgeting to balance political party autonomy with the moral and international obligations around advancing gender parity. Indeed, the literature review demonstrated the success Rwanda has had in advancing gender-targeted funding and gender parity.

The Multi-Party Democracy Fund could potentially become a vehicle for private donors committed to the principles of gender equity to support. This Fund could permit political parties to access a greater share of funds if they actively demonstrate a commitment to gender parity through gender quotas or gender empowerment and political backing and support to female candidates. Such a model may be easier to implement, and it could provide an opportunity to test the appetite of donors to commit funds to the broader goals of diversity, equality and inclusion within the political party system. The idea of incentivising parties to adopt gender

equity by linking private funding to representation can be seen as a way to balance the political dynamics without directly legislating candidate selection, thereby respecting party autonomy. The data demonstrate that advancing gender parity in political life should be done in a sensitive manner. Multiple tensions demonstrate gender in South African political life is still a sensitive matter.

5.14 Conclusions from interviews

The present study explored various aspects of the implementation of South Africa's Political Funding Act (PFA) by the Electoral Commission (IEC). Our findings highlight the IEC's perceived overall effectiveness in holding free and fair elections, while its capacity limitations weaken its effectiveness in implementing the PFA, which give rise to challenges in maintaining impartiality while enforcing the Act. Our assessment of the Act's implementation also examines political parties' compliance, debates surrounding the donations threshold and caps, the role of public versus private funding, and the potential for incorporating gender considerations into funding allocations. In addition, we considered alternative implementation models and the potential of the Multi-Party Democracy Fund. Overall, the study examined the complexities and challenges of regulating political funding to ensure transparency, fairness, and the integrity of South Africa's democratic processes.

Most respondents believed that the IEC is effectively implementing the PFA but recognised that the IEC has both strengths and weaknesses when implementing the Act. It was stated that the administrative arm of the IEC's Political Funding Unit is reasonably capacitated to perform some of its essential functions, but the investigation function is not capacitated at all. There are several limitations that hamper the IEC's effectiveness in implementing the PFA. These constraints are a result of the IEC's lack of investigative power, technical inefficiencies in the online funding declaration platform, and communication gaps that may affect both donors' and the public's understanding of the IEC's role.

In terms of ensuring effective compliance with the Act, the study showed that the IEC requires a multifaceted approach to capacity-building, including investing in technological tools, developing or acquiring forensic and auditing expertise, enhancing investigative and legal powers, recruiting skilled personnel, launching public awareness campaigns, and fostering coordination with other oversight bodies while maintaining its respected independence and impartiality. The IEC's biggest challenge remains to provide for as much transparency and consistency as possible during the enforcement of the PFA and its regulations, thereby building trust in dealings with political parties. It was apparent from the interviews that any sign of perceived favouritism or failure to act on publicly available information concerning glaring financial discrepancies could be viewed as being partial.

Overall, most key informant respondents indicated that the IEC's implementation of the PFA has led to significant disagreements with political parties, stemming from perceptions about inconsistencies in financial compliance oversight and enforcement. In this regard, the political party representatives interviewed also reported disputes with the IEC over 'sudden' changes in disclosure rules.

Feedback from the interviewees reflects a divergence in perceptions regarding the IEC's impartiality, with some political parties expressing scepticism, while civil society and donor respondents affirmed the Commission's neutrality. The IEC's ability to maintain its credibility and impartiality depends to a large degree on its ability to navigate complexities, which are exacerbated by the PFA mandate, but which may be moderated by public education and the availability and effective utilisation of adequate resources.

While most respondents believe that the IEC should retain overall responsibility for implementing the PFA, there are noteworthy arguments and support for considering alternative or complementary institutions. One significant argument suggests that the IEC's dual mandate creates inherent conflicts, and therefore, political funding regulation should be managed by a more technically focused body like the Auditor-General. This perspective highlights a concern that the IEC's primary role of administering free and fair elections might be compromised by the tension-laden responsibilities of enforcing the PFA. The argument is that a body with specific technical expertise in auditing and financial oversight, such as the Auditor-General, might be better suited for the complexities of political funding regulation. The PFA already provides for the Auditor-General to undertake discretionary audits of parties' reporting on use of public funds. The discretionary element to this authority exposes the Auditor-General to allegations of bias, unless it audits all parties' public funding reports. However, some respondents also noted the Auditor-General's already extensive mandate and workload, and expressed the concern that political finance may not receive the priority attention that it requires. In any event, the Auditor-General's mandate is restricted to public funds, which leaves private donations beyond the Auditor-General's scope of authority. This proposal therefore doesn't resolve the Commission's dilemma of the need to conduct forensic audits of private funding where appropriate and justified.

For this reason, respondents expressed broad support for the considering collaboration with other institutions to address the IEC's capacity constraints, especially to enhance investigative effectiveness. While bodies such as the Hawks (DPCI) and other law enforcement agencies were frequently mentioned as potential partners to support the IEC in implementing and enforcing the PFA, their mandates are limited to the possible criminal contraventions of the Act. Again, the IEC is left needing a partner for forensic investigations of alleged or suspected administrative contraventions. The South African Revenue Service (SARS) and the Financial Intelligence Centre (FIC) were mentioned as possible sources of relevant information and records, but it may

be doubtful that either of them could provide investigative assistance. In addition, the ability of SARS to provide the envisaged assistance might be constrained by the stringent legal requirement of taxpayer confidentiality. Some respondents mentioned the value of collaboration in the form of information-sharing with the FIC, with its ability to monitor banking transactions, could boost the PFU's ability to more accurately monitor financial flows. This suggests a recognition that while the IEC's effectiveness could be significantly improved by leveraging the specialised expertise and resources of other institutions, it might be obliged to remain the primary implementing body for the PFA.

The key message from respondents is that the IEC's credibility and effectiveness in enforcing the PFA depend on its ability to either enhance the PFU's own internal monitoring and investigative capacity and perhaps autonomy within the IEC, or to leverage key external expertise through partnerships, or to reconsider its role entirely to ensure that its core mandate of administering free and fair elections remains uncompromised. This implies that if the IEC continues to face significant capacity challenges or if the perception grows of conflicts between its dual mandates, the arguments for a more fundamental shift towards an alternative implementing institution might gain stronger traction. However, practical factors such as likely continuing fiscal constraints in the country suggest that establishing a new institution to implement the PFA is an unlikely prospect.

In summary, to ensure effective compliance with the PFA, the IEC needs a multifaceted approach to capacity-building that addresses its current limitations in monitoring and investigative capacities, use of technology, expertise, and public outreach. These enhancements are crucial for safeguarding the integrity of South Africa's democratic processes and building trust in the IEC's dealings with political parties by ensuring transparency and consistency in the enforcement of the PFA and its regulations.

6. Conclusions

The summary findings contained in this section are informed by a thematic analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data presented in this report. While the pattern of results from the nationally representative survey will remain unchanged, the qualitative key informant interviews that were conducted may be further supplemented following the Electoral Commission's workshop event that is being conducted in Durban on 18-19 June 2025. Such additional qualitative data might result in additional insight or nuances to the concluding findings as detailed below. It is for this reason that the summarised concluding findings listed here are deemed to be 'interim' for now. In structuring this section, we return to the core objectives and guiding questions that informed the study.

RESULTS FROM REPRESENTATIVE PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND DONATIONS

As context for the study, it is important to note that public dissatisfaction with the political and democratic status quo in South Africa is widespread. About four-fifths of the adult public believe that the country is headed in the wrong direction, with 58% of the public expressing discontent with democracy. Trust in political parties and politicians is low, with only 17% and 14% of the adult public, respectively, expressing confidence in them. Political disengagement is also prevalent, as most South Africans (including party members) show little interest in politics. Despite scepticism about electoral management, 66% of age-eligible voters would participate in an election if it was held tomorrow, and three-quarters see voting as a civic duty. Although confidence in democracy is weak, people still see electoral participation as an important part of being a citizen.

Political donations are not common in South Africa; less than a tenth of the mass public have ever donated to a political party or independent candidate. Among non-donors, 73% of them expressed no interest in donating in the future. Levels of participation varied across socio-demographic groups, with coloured adults more likely to have donated compared to Indian and white adults. Contrary to expectations, wealth and education were not strong predictors of donation behaviour. Gender played a role; women were less likely than men to donate to a political party or an independent candidate. Electoral participation was weakly linked to donation behaviour, with party members and supporters more inclined to contribute. It is important to remember that response bias may affect these findings, as individuals may be reluctant to disclose political donations due to privacy concerns or perceived social desirability considerations.

Public opinion on the freedom to donate to political parties and independent candidates in South Africa is generally neutral or positive. About half of all adults agreed or strongly agreed that people should have this freedom. There were attitudinal differences among population groups, with white adults more likely to disagree. In addition, strong regional variations could be observed, with higher levels of agreement in KwaZulu-Natal and lower levels in the Free State. Electoral participation appeared to shape attitudes; regular voters were more likely to support the freedom to donate than sporadic voters or non-voters. Interestingly, prior donation behaviour did not significantly influence attitudes here, suggesting that perceptions of this freedom are shaped more by broader democratic engagement than by direct experience with donations.

PUBLIC BACKING FOR POLITICAL DONATIONS RULES

Public awareness of the Political Funding Act (PFA) in South Africa is generally low, with 61% of the adult public having never heard of it. Awareness is strongly linked to education, socio-

economic status, and political engagement, with more educated and wealthier individuals, as well as those who have donated to political parties or are politically active, being more informed. Women were less aware of the PFA than men, and awareness levels varied across provinces, being especially low in Mpumalanga and Limpopo. While political party members had higher levels of awareness, the difference between active and inactive members was minimal. These findings highlight a significant gap in public knowledge on this important issue, indicating the need for greater civic education and outreach to improve transparency and accountability on this issue for certain key groups. It should be noted that public awareness is low in many areas of political life, including awareness for instance of the work of the Zondo Commission despite it being televised and reported on for four years.

Public support for laws like the PFA was found to be relatively muted, with only 42% of the general public expressing support while 14% opposed such regulation. A large portion of the mass public remained neutral (29%) or unsure (16%) about this issue. Support was higher among those with post-secondary education and varied by province, with the strongest backing observed in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal and the weakest in Northern Cape and Free State. White adults were more likely to oppose laws like the PFA than other population groups, even after controlling for socio-demographic factors. Past political donation behaviour did not significantly influence support for financial regulation. But amongst non-participants, those who intended to donate in the future were more likely to support them (55%) compared to those with no intention (37%) or past donors (41%).

Most adults expressed concern that political parties and independent candidates are influenced by donations from wealthy elites. We discovered 16% of the general public was extremely worried, 21% very worried, and 33% somewhat worried. In contrast, a minority (23%) of adults reported little to no concern while 6% were uncertain. Higher levels of education and socio-economic status were associated with greater concern about elite influence. Being a regular voter was also correlated with being worried about this issue. Regionally, the level of concern about elite manipulation was highest in the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal. It was, by comparison, lowest in the Eastern Cape, Limpopo and Northern Cape. Individuals concerned about elite manipulation were more likely to support financial regulations like the PFA.

Survey results revealed that public perceptions of transparency in political donations are mixed, with roughly half of adults believing the public has too little or far too little information about who donates to political parties and independent candidates. Subgroup analysis showed notable provincial differences in concern about the information environment, with higher concern in Mpumalanga. There were also educational attainment differences; concern about the level of public information was highest amongst those with a post-secondary education. Concern about the level of transparency was linked to awareness of the PFA. Survey findings also highlighted the role of transparency concerns in shaping public attitudes toward regulatory measures like

the PFA. Those who perceived there to be insufficient public information were more likely to support regulatory measures.

Our data showed polarised public opinions on the R15-million annual donation limit for political parties and independent candidates. Nearly half (46%) of all adults considered the cap too high or far too high, while 29% viewed it as appropriate and only 10% thought it was too low. Socio-demographic analysis showed significant provincial and socio-economic differences, with wealthier individuals and residents in provinces like Gauteng and the Free State more likely to favour stricter donation limits. Support for laws like the PFA correlated with perceptions of the donation cap, as those backing such laws were less likely to view the limit as excessive.

Public opinion was quite divided on the R100,000 donation reporting threshold for political parties and independent candidates. We found that 41% of the general public considered it appropriate, 22% view it as too high and 23% believed it was too low. Subgroup analysis showed significant differences by race and province of residence. White adults and residents in the Free State and the Northern Cape were found to be more likely to view the threshold as inadequate. Awareness of the PFA also influenced opinions about threshold limits, those familiar with the law were more likely to consider the threshold excessive.

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TO THE ROLE OF THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

About two-thirds (64%) of the adult public believed the Electoral Commission should be primarily responsible for collecting information on political party and independent candidate funding. A minority (11%) of the public felt no organisation should have this responsibility, and around 13% suggested an alternative institution should handle it. A preference for the Electoral Commission varied by educational attainment, with formal schooling positively correlated with a partiality for the Electoral Commission. We also found that a preference for the Commission was stronger among those who participated in politics. Active political party members and voters were more likely to favour the Electoral Commission in this role, while non-voters showed less support for its responsibility.

Public opinion data indicates that most of the mass public consider it important for the Electoral Commission to collect information on political expenditure, with a significant portion assigning it high importance scores. Those in higher income socio-economic groups were more likely to view it as critical. Past donors to political parties or independent candidates were less likely to think this was an important task. Support for laws like the PFA correlated with the perceived importance of tracking political spending. Furthermore, individuals who were concerned about the influence of wealthy donors on politics rated the importance of collecting funding data higher than those who were less worried. Additionally, adults who felt the public lacked sufficient information on political donations were more likely to prioritise the Electoral Commission's role in gathering data.

A majority of the general public believed that the Electoral Commission should prioritise tracking funding sources for political parties and independent candidates. Approximately a third (30%) thought it was moderately important and 38% considered it very important. Only a small minority (13%) deem it unimportant. Those who value tracking political funding sources tend to think that monitoring party and candidate spending was important. Analysis reveals that people view both information-gathering activities as equally important. People who were concerned about wealthy donors influencing politics are more likely to think funding information gathering to be important. Those who believe there is a deficiency in funding information are more likely to think that this task is important.

A substantial portion of the mass public lacked confidence in the Electoral Commission's ability to accurately collect funding information from political parties. Roughly a fifth (19%) had no confidence in the Commission and 17% had little confidence. Responses to this question differed by educational attainment; individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to provide an answer that they were confident and less likely to respond with "don't know". This group has a better understanding of the political climate and tends to have a higher trust in election transparency. Confidence also varied by province, being highest in Mpumalanga and lowest in the Eastern Cape as well as KwaZulu-Natal. Black Africans generally expressed more confidence than other population (especially white individuals). We found that people who value funding transparency were more likely to trust the Electoral Commission's ability to collect that information. In addition, our research suggests that individuals with direct experience in political donations were more sceptical of its monitoring abilities.

The adult public was not confident in the Electoral Commission's ability to take action against political parties and independent candidates who fail to comply with the PFA or provide inaccurate funding information. Less than a tenth (9%) gave the Commission a very high confidence score on this issue and 12% expressed fairly high confidence. Slightly over a third (36%) expressed moderate confidence, a fifth (19%) low confidence, and an equivalent share (19%) very low confidence, while 5% were uncertain how to respond. Those who were more confident in the Commission's ability to gather political funding information also tended to have higher confidence in its ability to enforce compliance with the PFA. People who were concerned about the influence of wealthy donors on politics were more likely to trust the Commission's enforcement abilities. It would seem that they viewed the Commission as a safeguard against elite manipulation. Additionally, individuals who believed in the freedom to donate to political parties showed higher confidence in the Commission's enforcement role. This group may see the work of the Commission as essential for ensuring transparency and accountability while protecting the political system from corruption.

ATTITUDES TO THE MULTI-PARTY DEMOCRACY FUND

Survey findings reveal a largely uninformed public regarding the Multi-Party Democracy Fund (MPDF), which was established in April 2021, with over half (58%) of adults never having heard of it. Only a small minority (11%) of the public had heard quite a bit or a lot about it. Awareness of the MPDF is strongly correlated with higher levels of educational attainment and socio-economic status. In addition, awareness levels varied by province of residence with awareness particularly low in Limpopo and Mpumalanga. Awareness also varied by gender and population group, being lower for women and members of the black African majority. Awareness of the MPDF is also positively correlated with awareness of the PFA, people who were more aware of the former were discovered to be more aware of the latter. These results indicate a need for intensified public outreach and education for certain groups.

There is a significant lack of confidence in the Electoral Commission's ability to manage the MPDF fairly and effectively, with roughly two-fifths of adults expressing either very low confidence (24%) or fairly low confidence (19%). Levels of confidence vary by socio-demographic factors, with higher education and socio-economic status correlating with greater trust in the Commission. There is also a lot of provincial variation on this issue; provinces like Limpopo and the North West were discovered to have relatively low levels of confidence. Awareness of the MPDF also plays a role, as those more informed about the fund tend to have higher confidence in its management. Additionally, there is a strong positive correlation between confidence in the Commission's ability to collect funding information and its management of the MPDF. This suggests that trust in its technical capabilities underpins broader confidence in its regulatory functions.

Data analysis found widespread reluctance among South Africans to donate to the MPDF; nearly three quarters of adults said they were not at all (47%) or not very (27%) willing to donate. We were able to discern that willingness to donate was higher among past political donors, party supporters, and individuals aware of the MPDF. These findings suggest that political engagement and awareness were strong predictors of willingness to donate. Socio-demographic factors also play a role, with older generations and residents in the Eastern Cape being less inclined to contribute. Adults who have never voted are less willing to donate to the MPDF than the national average, with most expressing little or no interest. In addition, those who have previously donated to a party or candidate are more likely to contribute to the MPDF. These results show the need for targeted outreach to increase public support for the MPDF.

Fieldworkers asked survey participants an open-ended question about why they were willing or unwilling to donate to the MPDF. Many adults expressed reluctance to donate due to a lack of awareness, distrust in political processes in general, and concerns about the misuse of funds. Financial constraints also play a significant role; some of the mass public felt unable to contribute beyond their basic needs. On the other hand, those willing to donate see it as a civic duty to strengthen democracy, promote transparency, and empower marginalised groups (particularly

women). These findings reaffirm the need for improved public education and outreach to address scepticism and foster broader support for the MPDF as a tool for political accountability and social change.

Survey participants were asked if they would be willing to donate to the MPDF if a tax rebate was offered. This offer was discovered to have a limited influence on public willingness to donate to the MPDF, with two-thirds of the mass public expressing low willingness regardless of the incentive. These findings suggest that financial incentives alone are unlikely to significantly alter public attitudes toward political donations. Gender, education, province, race, and political affiliation shaped responses. We discovered that men, younger adults, and people living in the Western Cape showed higher willingness to donate under these conditions. By contrast, more educated, white adults as well as residents of the Eastern Cape, the Northern Cape and the North West showed less willingness. Active political party members and past donors were more likely to respond positively to the rebate offer.

CHANGES TO POLITICAL FINANCE REGULATIONS

We found that a majority (55%) of the public supports tracking political party expenditures as an effective way to verify the accuracy of reported donations, reflecting a belief in financial monitoring as a tool for transparency. Public opinion on this issue varied across socio-demographic groups, with higher socio-economic status and education levels correlated with stronger support for this idea. We found that those in certain provinces (i.e., the Northern Cape and Limpopo) expressed less confidence in this method. Voters and those intending to donate to political parties or independent candidates in the future are more likely to support expenditure tracking, suggesting that future donors may favour stricter financial oversight. Past donors, on the other hand, exhibited scepticism about this option. These findings highlight the need for tailored communication and policy design to address public concerns and build trust in political financing mechanisms.

Approximately half (49%) of the adult public supported the idea that political parties receiving public funds should be required to promote and support female representatives. We detected population group differences; members of the white and Indian minorities were more likely than other groups to express opposition to usage of political funding as a mechanism to promote the representation of vulnerable groups, such as women. Support for this proposal was found to be highest in KwaZulu-Natal and weakest in in the Free State and the Western Cape. More educated individuals showed greater support for the provision. Generational differences in support for using public funds for political equality were small, though Generation Z was slightly less likely to agree than other generations. Voters and politically active individuals were more likely to endorse this precondition for political parties receiving public funds. These findings highlight public recognition of gender disparities in politics and suggest moderate support for using public funding as a tool to advance gender equality in politics.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS WITH THEMATIC EXPERTS

This section of the research study relied on the views of the key informant respondents who comprised gender experts, political party representatives, academics, civil society representatives, union and media representatives, and donors.

EFFECTIVENESS OF ELECTORAL COMMISSION IN IMPLEMENTING THE PFA

Most respondents believed that, overall, the IEC is effectively implementing the PFA but acknowledged some strengths and weaknesses. For instance, respondents felt that the administrative arm for political funding is considered reasonably capacitated, but that the investigation function could be clarified and strengthened. The IEC's effectiveness is hampered by some uncertainty and unevenness concerning its investigative authority and capacity, technical inefficiencies in the online funding declaration platform, and perceived communication weaknesses affecting donor and public understanding of the IEC's mandates and roles.

ENSURING EFFECTIVE COMPLIANCE WITH THE PFA

Virtually every respondent believes that the IEC also faces challenges in ensuring effective compliance with the Act. In this regard, the biggest challenge for the IEC is to provide as much transparency and consistency as possible during the enforcement of the Act and regulations and to build trust in its dealings with political parties and reporting to the public.

PERCEIVED IMPARTIALITY OF THE COMMISSION

Perceptions regarding the IEC's impartiality differed, with some political parties expressing scepticism, while civil society and donor respondents strongly affirmed the IEC's neutrality. Public attitudes are similarly divided. The IEC's ability to maintain its credibility and impartiality depends largely on its ability to navigate complexities, potentially supported by enhanced public education and adequate resources. Any sign of perceived favouritism or not taking account of glaring financial discrepancies could be viewed as being partial.

ADDITIONAL CAPACITY FOR THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

Virtually all key informants interviewed suggested that the IEC requires one or more capacity enhancement for effective PFA compliance. This includes improving the reliability and accessibility of electronic reporting systems by simplifying processes and automating reminders. The availability of forensic and auditing expertise would strengthen the capacity to ensure that financial disclosures are more effectively verified, as would ready access to relevant information held by other state institutions. The PFA investigation function is currently outsourced on a case-by-case basis to an IEC-mandated panel of independent investigators.

Expanding existing public awareness campaigns could enhance public understanding by clarifying the IEC's role, potentially strengthening its credibility and impartiality. Furthermore, fostering coordination with other oversight bodies while maintaining the IEC's independence is crucial. Potential partners identified include the Auditor-General, SARS, the FIC, the Hawks, and other law enforcement agencies.

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE REGULATORY MODELS

It is important to recognise that these two models aim to achieve different regulatory objectives. Monitoring income prioritises transparency about contestants, which empowers voters and prevents undue foreign or domestic influence, while tracking or regulating expenditure promotes a level playing field for political contestants and helps prevent wealthy parties buying influence through massive campaigns.

South Africa's current political funding regulatory regime primarily monitors income, specifically donations to political parties and independent candidates, although the PFA requires all registered political parties to submit audited annual financial statements that include expenditure. However, this approach has limitations, as many respondents believe that political parties may not declare all income or may disguise donations as income through events like gala dinners. These types of actions raise concerns that an income-based system alone may not ensure sufficient transparency.

Some respondents therefore advocated for an expenditure-based system, suggesting that it would provide a more reasonable measure of a party's financial activities and connections. The respondents also reasoned that an expenditure-based model could also lead to more uniform regulation by including a limit on campaign expenditure and might be easier to audit. However, concerns exist regarding the administrative feasibility and burden of monitoring all expenditures, as highlighted by respondents and the experience cited from the UK.

Besides the choice between an income or an expenditure approach, some respondents recommended a hybrid model, in which there is a combination of income and expenditure monitoring. These respondents reasoned that it is a more comprehensive and reliable approach to detect dishonesty. Monitoring both aspects would provide a more complete picture of party funding and allow for investigations if there is a significant discrepancy between declared income and expenditure. International guidelines also suggest including both categories of information. It is acknowledged that the administrative burden and the need for a gradual transition are important considerations. Overall, while the current income-based system provides a foundation, incorporating expenditure monitoring in some form could enhance transparency and accountability.

THE BENEFITS AND RISKS OF PRIVATE FUNDING

The impact of direct private funding on electoral democracy is a contested topic, with varying perspectives on its benefits and risks. Private funding is essential for political competition, particularly for new and smaller parties to enter the political landscape. Without private funding, new party entrants and independent candidates would struggle to compete and could even disappear. In contrast, concerns exist that as complete reliance on state funding could entrench the power of incumbent parties, who might use funding to maintain their dominance. Private funding is also a crucial element of the constitutional rights to freedom of association and expression.

However, significant risks are associated with private funding, primarily the potential for undue influence and corruption. The idea that “there's no free lunch” highlights the concern that private donors may expect something in return for their contributions. Some respondents suggested that moving private donations through a neutral body like the Multi-Party Democracy Fund could mitigate these risks.

Transparency is consistently emphasised as a crucial factor in managing the risks associated with private funding. Efforts should focus on improving transparency regarding the sources of private funding.

PRIVATE DONATIONS: SHOULD THE THRESHOLD AND CAP BE CHANGED?

Most political parties interviewed were in favour of loosening restrictions, while most other stakeholders were largely in support of tightening them, i.e., a lower disclosure threshold and a lower annual donation limit (cap). These preferences partly align with public opinion, with dominant responses consistently favouring a lower annual donation limit, but providing a more mixed view on disclosure thresholds. The most cited public response was to leave the disclosure threshold at the current level, with equal shares saying it should be lowered and raised. The issue may now be moot, following the National Assembly's resolution in May 2025 to double both. The recommendation in the NA's resolution will now be considered by the President in terms of the PFA.

IS THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION THE MOST APPROPRIATE INSTITUTION TO IMPLEMENT THE PFA?

While most respondents believe the IEC should retain overall oversight responsibility for implementing the PFA, there are arguments for considering alternative or supplementary institutions. One such argument suggests that the IEC's dual mandate (administering elections and enforcing the PFA) creates inherent conflicts, and that political funding regulation, especially investigations, might be better managed by a separate more technically focused body. This perspective highlights concerns that the IEC's primary role of ensuring free and fair elections could be compromised by its current dual mandate. There is broad support for collaboration

with other institutions to address the IEC's capacity constraints and enhance investigative effectiveness.

GENDER PARITY AND POLITICAL FUNDING

Political party funding, gender parity, and women's representation have become increasingly important topics in scholarly and policy discussions surrounding electoral systems and political participation. Despite the growing recognition of the need for gender equality in politics, women's political representation remains significantly low, with women holding only a small proportion of parliamentary and ministerial positions globally. Despite a recent decline, women's representation among public representatives remains comparatively high in South Africa. This underrepresentation can be attributed to various structural barriers, including entrenched gender norms, limited access to financial resources, and societal expectations that constrain women's political involvement. While quotas and affirmative action policies have made steady strides in improving gender parity, the unequal distribution of political funding continues to undermine true gender equality in political spaces. These dynamics highlight the intersection between political funding and gender, where financial barriers create significant challenges for women in accessing among others the necessary resources to run successful political campaigns.

In the South African context, understanding the role of financial support in shaping women's political participation is vital for addressing the gender disparities that persist within the country's political system. Despite significant progress in promoting gender equality, such as the introduction of gender quotas in the African National Congress, for example, and the establishment of a relatively high percentage of women in Parliament, financial barriers continue to hinder women's full political participation. Women in South Africa, particularly those from marginalised communities, often lack access to the necessary resources, networks, and donor support that would allow them to campaign and compete in elections effectively. These challenges are compounded by traditional gender norms and the male-dominated political environment, which limit women's influence and visibility in high-profile political positions. Without targeted financial support and gender-responsive political funding mechanisms, women may struggle to overcome these structural barriers, perpetuating a cycle of underrepresentation. Thus, addressing the intersection of financial resources and gender equality is essential to creating a more inclusive political landscape in South Africa, where women can have equal opportunities to influence policy and governance. Some key informants supported exploring the Multi-Party Democracy Fund (MPDF) as a vehicle to promote more equal gender representation.

THE MULTI-PARTY DEMOCRACY FUND

Public opinion survey data demonstrates that public awareness of the MPDF is very low. Almost 80% of respondents indicated that they know nothing or only a little about the Fund. Less than

20% of respondents indicated some possible interest in contributing to the Fund. Stakeholders interviewed suggested that most donors are more interested in a party's policies than in contributing to a fund that distributes contributions to all represented political parties, some of which promote policies not favoured by contributors. The survey results show that the possibility of tax deductions to incentivise contributions appears to have limited appeal in changing pro-donation inclinations.

Some stakeholders cautioned the Commission to safeguard its independence and impartiality as the EMB while undertaking any initiatives to raise awareness of and interest in the Fund. The Commission's role in MPDF engagement should maintain a clear separation between its regulatory responsibilities and contributor mobilisation efforts.

7. Way forward

This report has identified public attitudes, stakeholder and expert opinions, as well as various trends involving the regulation of political funding in South Africa. The report is submitted to the Electoral Commission for further consideration. Any possible further work will be carried out by the Commission.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/25 IEC political funding module

SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIAL ATTITUDES SURVEY **Questionnaire 1: January/March 2025**



RESPONDENTS AGED 16 YEARS +

Good (morning/afternoon/evening), I'm _____ and we are conducting a survey for the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). The HSRC regularly conducts surveys of opinion amongst the South African population. Topics include a wide range of social matters such as communications, politics, education, unemployment, the problems of the aged and inter-group relations. As a follow-up to this earlier work, we would like to ask you questions on a variety of subjects that are of national importance. To obtain reliable, scientific information we request that you answer the questions that follow as honestly as possible. Your opinion is important in this research. The area in which you live and you yourself have been selected randomly for the purpose of this survey. The fact that you have been chosen is thus quite coincidental. The information you give to us will be kept confidential. You and your household members will not be identified by name or address in any of the reports we plan to write.

PARTICULARS OF VISITS

	DAY	MONTH	TIME STARTED		TIME COMPLETED		**RESPONSE	
			HR	MIN	HR	MIN		
First visit		/ / 2025						
Second visit		/ / 2025						
Third visit		/ / 2025						

****RESPONSE CODES**

Completed questionnaire	=	01
Partially completed questionnaire (specify reason)	=	02
<u>Revisit</u>		
Appointment made	=	03
Selected respondent not at home	=	04
No one home	=	05
<u>Do not qualify</u>		
Vacant house/flat/stand/not a house or flat/demolished	=	06
No person qualifies according to the survey specifications	=	07
Respondent cannot communicate with interviewer because of language	=	08
Respondent is physically/mentally not fit to be interviewed	=	09

<u>Refusals</u>	
Contact person refused	= 10
Interview refused by selected respondent	= 11
Interview refused by parent	= 12
Interview refused by other household member	= 13
<u>OFFICE USE</u>	
	= 14

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

POLITICAL PARTY FUNDING

In 2021, a new law came into effect that requires all political parties and independent candidates and representatives to say where their funding comes from. This new legislation is called the Political Party Funding Act (PPFA). The PPFA also gives the Electoral Commission (IEC) the responsibility to monitor and enforce political parties' compliance with the Act.

1. How much have you heard or read about the Political Party Funding Act (PPFA)?

Nothing	1
A little	2
Quite a bit	3
A lot	4
(Don't know)	8

2. To what extent do you support or oppose laws like the Political Party Funding Act (PPFA) that require all political parties and independent candidates to say where their funding comes from?

Strongly support	1
Support	2
Neither support nor oppose	3
Oppose	4
Strongly oppose	5
(Don't know)	8

3. At present, a person is allowed to donate a maximum amount of R15-million to a political party or independent candidate in a year. Do you think this amount is too low, too high or about right?

Far too low	1
Too low	2
About right	3
Too high	4
Far too high	5
(Refusal)	7
(Don't know)	8

4. At present, political parties and independent candidates must report donations of R100,000 or more. Do you think this amount is too low, too high or about right?

Far too low	1
Too low	2

About right	3
Too high	4
Far too high	5
(Refusal)	7
(Don't know)	8

5. Overall, how important is it for the Electoral Commission to collect information about where political parties and independent candidates in South Africa get their funding from? [*SHOWCARD 15*]

Not at all important											Very important	(Refusal)	(Do not know)
00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10		77	88

6. In addition, how important is it for the Electoral Commission to collect information on how much money political parties and independent candidates in South Africa are spending? [*SHOWCARD 15*]

Not at all important											Very important	(Refusal)	(Do not know)
00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10		77	88

7. To what extent do you agree or disagree that monitoring how much a political party is spending is a good way to check how accurately it is reporting the donations it has received? [*SHOWCARD 1*]

Strongly agree	1
Agree	2
Neither agree nor disagree	3
Disagree	4
Strongly disagree	5
(Do not know)	8

8. In your opinion, who should be primarily responsible for collecting information about where political parties and independent candidates in South Africa get their funding?

The Electoral Commission (IEC)	1
Another institution (specify)	2
(No one should be collecting such information)	7
(Don't know)	8
(Refused)	9

9. In general, how confident are you that the Electoral Commission has been able to collect accurate information about where political parties and independent candidates in South Africa get their funding from? [*SHOWCARD 16*]

Not at all confident											Completely confident	(Refusal)	(Do not know)
00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10		77	88

10. In general, how confident are you that the Electoral Commission (IEC) is able to take action against political parties and independent candidates who do not comply with the Party Funding Act or fail to provide accurate information on their funding? [*SHOWCARD 16*]

Not at all confident										Completely confident		(Refusal)	(Do not know)
00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10		77	88

Political parties and independent candidates in South Africa raise money from different sources to fund their activities. Sometimes rich people will give political parties and independent candidates lots of money in donations.

11. To what extent do you agree or disagree that you should have the freedom to donate money to political parties and independent candidates? [*SHOWCARD 1*]

Strongly agree	1
Agree	2
Neither agree nor disagree	3
Disagree	4
Strongly disagree	5
(Do not know)	8

12. Overall, how worried are you that the decisions and actions of political parties and independent candidates in South Africa are being influenced by donations from the rich and powerful?

Not at all worried	1
Not very worried	2
Somewhat worried	3
Very worried	4
Extremely worried	5
(Refusal)	7
(Don't know)	8

13. How much have you heard or read about the Multi-Party Democracy Fund (MPDF)?

Nothing	1
A little	2
Quite a bit	3
A lot	4
(Don't know)	8

The Political Party Funding Act (PPFA) established a Multi-Party Democracy Fund (MPDF) to raise and distribute funds from the private sector and individuals to all political parties and independent candidates represented in Parliament. The Electoral Commission administers the MPDF and distributes the funds.

14. In general, how confident are you that the Electoral Commission manages the Multi-Party Democracy Fund (MPDF) fairly and effectively? [*SHOWCARD 16*]

Not at all confident											Completely confident		(Refusal)	(Do not know)
00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10			77	88

15. To what extent do you agree or disagree that one of the conditions of a political party receiving public money should be that it promotes and supports female representatives (e.g., on its party lists and in leadership roles)? [*SHOWCARD 1*]

Strongly agree	1
Agree	2
Neither agree nor disagree	3
Disagree	4
Strongly disagree	5
(Do not know)	8

16. And how willing would you be to donate to the Multi-Party Democracy Fund (MPDF)?

Not at all willing	1
Not very willing	2
Willing	3
Very willing	4
(Don't know)	8

17. Please explain your answer.

(Don't know) 88

18. Would you be more or less willing to donate to the Multi-Party Democracy Fund (MPDF) if you received some money back on the taxes you pay (i.e., tax rebate)?

Not at all willing	1
Not very willing	2
Willing	3
Very willing	4
(Don't pay income tax)	5
(Don't know)	8

19. Have you previously donated money to or raised funds for a political party or an independent candidate?

Have done it in the past year	1
Have done it in the more distant past	2
Have not done it, but might do it in future	3
Have not done it, and would never do it	4
(Refused)	9

- 20. Do you think the general public has too little or too much information about who donates money to political parties and independent candidates in South Africa?**

Far too little	1
Too little	2
Enough	3
Too much	4
Far too much	5
(Do not know)	8

Appendix 2: Key informant interview (KII) schedule



Experiences of the Implementation of the Political Funding Act, 2018 Interview Instrument for Electoral Commission Study – February 2025

The Political Party Funding Act 6 of 2018 (PPFA) (now the Political Funding Act, 2018 since the 2024 Amendments - PFA) came into effect in April 2021. Since then, electoral stakeholders, including political parties, independent candidates and donors, have had the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the provisions of the PFA and to work with the Electoral Commission (IEC) to comply with the Act's provisions.

Part A The PFA and the IEC

1. The PFA mandates the IEC to monitor and enforce political parties', independent candidates' and donors' compliance with the Act's provisions, particularly its reporting and disclosure requirements.
 - a. Overall, do you think the IEC is implementing the PFA effectively? If not, what improvements do you suggest?
 - b. Overall, do you think that the IEC is implementing the PFA impartially? If not, what improvements do you suggest?
 - c. Do you believe that the IEC is the most appropriate institution to implement this Act? Please motivate your response.
2. What type(s) of capacity does the Electoral Commission require to be able to effectively ensure compliance with the Act by political parties and all other stakeholders?¹
3. Are you aware of any concerns about the manner in which the IEC has endeavoured to –
 - a. monitor compliance; or
 - b. enforce compliancewith the PFA?
4. Are you aware of any disagreements or conflict between any political parties or independent candidates and the IEC arising from the manner in which the IEC has endeavoured to implement the PFA?
5. Do you think that the IEC's constitutional mandate to ensure free and fair elections is in any way in conflict with its monitoring, compliance and enforcement responsibilities in terms of the PFA?

¹ In this context, 'capacity' could include the provisions of the legal framework, organisational structure, budget, number of personnel, skills, etc.

6. Do you think that the IEC's responsibility to implement the PFA has undermined or strengthened perceptions of its ability to remain impartial, or its actual impartiality, to ensure free and fair elections?
7. Do you think that alleged breaches of the provisions of the PFA by either donors, political parties or independent candidates should be investigated by an organisation other than the IEC? If so, do you have any suggestions about which existing organisation might be more appropriate to undertake these investigations?

Part B: The PFA, political parties, and independent candidates and representatives

1. Despite the legal uncertainty that prevailed after the provisions of the PFA concerning disclosure thresholds and donation caps were removed by Parliament and until the court's decision to reinstate these provisions, most political parties continued to comply with these thresholds and caps, and with their reporting obligations to the IEC. Why do you think political parties continued to respect these disclosure and reporting 'obligations'?
2. Are the current thresholds for disclosure of private donations to political parties (R100 000) and annual caps on donations from a single source (R15 million) appropriate or should they be changed, i.e. increased or decreased? Please motivate your response.
3. South Africa's political funding regulatory regime is primarily income-based (i.e., it focuses on monitoring donations or income) while some other jurisdictions have adopted a predominantly expenditure-based approach (i.e., the expenditure by political parties and independent candidates/representatives is the focus of monitoring). Which approach better serves the purpose of funding transparency and accountability, which are the primary objectives of South Africa's political funding legislation? Please motivate your response.
4. What is the impact on and implications for electoral democracy of direct private funding of political parties and independent candidates? On balance, do the benefits of private funding (such as strengthening political competition) outweigh the risks associated with private funding (such as undue influence) of political role-players? Please motivate your response.

Political funding and gender

5. Do you think gender considerations affect how political parties distribute their funding? Have you noticed any trends or differences in your (or any other) political party?
6. Do political parties treat male and female electoral candidates differently when allocating funds? If so, how?
7. Do private or corporate donations negatively influence the number of women on political parties' candidates lists?

8. How important is gender-sensitive budgeting² in political campaigns?

² Gender-sensitive budgeting is the practice of considering the different needs and priorities of men and women when planning and allocating financial resources in political campaigns, for example.

9. What can be done to encourage political parties to invest more in women-led initiatives and gender-equal policies at all levels?
10. Could political funding, possibly including public allocations and / or private donations, be used in ways that advance, encourage or promote other relevant social objectives, such as equal gender representation in parties' candidates lists?

Multi-Party Democracy Fund

11. The PFA established the Multi-Party Democracy Fund as a vehicle for donors to contribute to strengthening constitutional democracy without choosing to make a donation to one or more particular or preferred political party. However, the Fund has attracted very little interest from donors, with comparatively far fewer and smaller donations than to political parties or independent candidates. Instead of making a donation to the Fund, for example, some donors have chosen to make donations directly to more than one political party or independent candidate.
 - a. What are the reasons that the MPDF is less preferred compared to direct funding of political parties and independents?
 - b. Does the MPDF have a role to play in the political funding architecture in South Africa? Is it relevant (in current circumstances)?
 - c. If yes, how could donations to this Fund be encouraged or incentivised?
12. Is there any additional information that you believe we should take into account for this study?

**Thank you for participating in this interview, and
for sharing your expertise and insights with us.**



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