

Will corruption affect the youth vote in South Africa's 2014 election?

BY LAUREN TRACEY

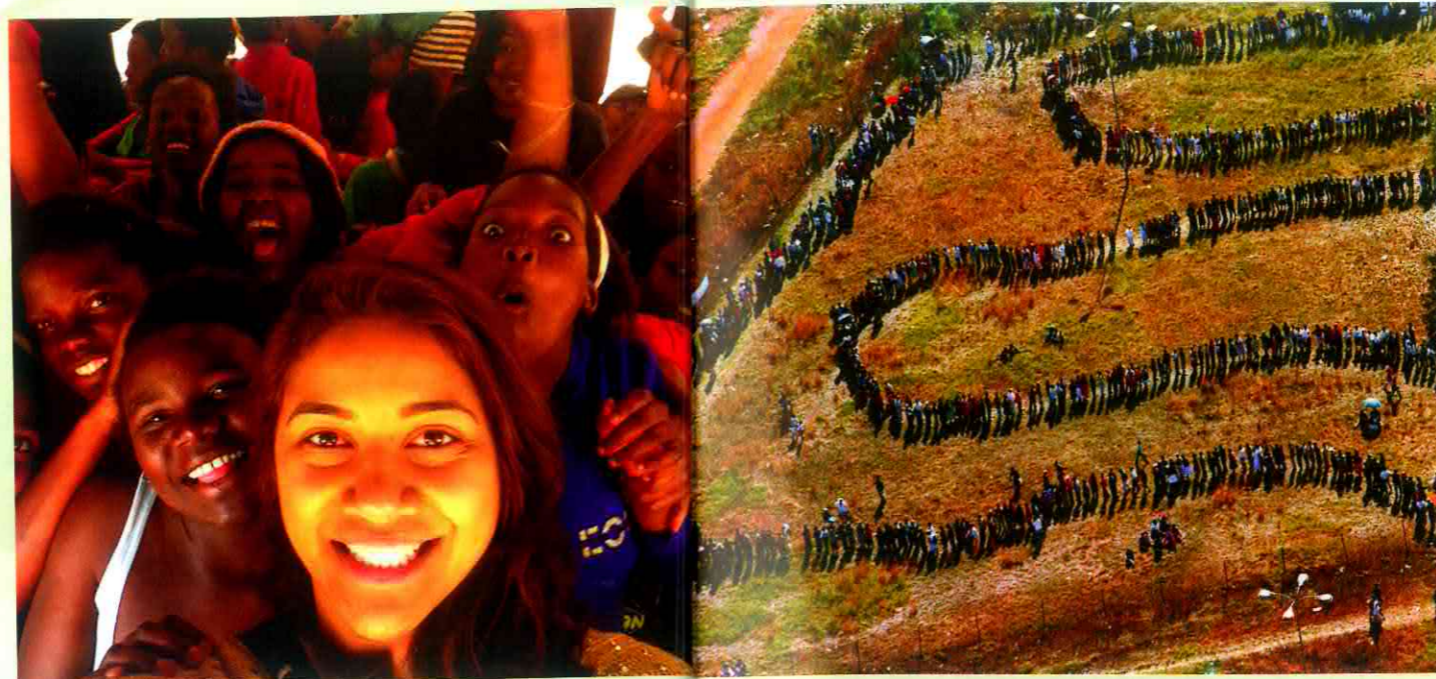
The youth of South Africa are resilient, resourceful and responsive.

However, it is yet to be seen whether they can play an active role in the fight against corruption by using the ballot to hold their political leaders accountable for improving governance. Young people are often among the hardest hit by corruption, as public money that could have improved their lives ends up in the back pockets of private individuals. In March 2013, a youth survey conducted by Pondering Panda, a Stellenbosch, Western Cape-based research company,¹ found that 69% of the youth believed that corruption in government had increased in the past year. A survey conducted by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR)² in 2012 revealed a decline in the level of trust among the South African youth in the country's leaders "to do what's right", after it dropped by 7% between 2010 and 2012. Now, almost half of the youth (49%) do not trust the country's political leaders to do the right thing.

While many members of the political and economic elite may not be that concerned with ending corruption, given the benefits it brings them, it is clear from the above surveys that the South African youth are increasingly aware of what is going on.

Hard to win hearts and minds

In South Africa, a lack of transparency and accountability within various state departments serves as a contributing factor to corruption, with corrupt groups or individuals well aware that there is little chance of their getting caught. A good example of this is the Minister of Intelligence recently classifying as 'top secret' the report into the more than R200 million spent on President Jacob Zuma's private home.³ This implies that those with the most political responsibility will not be held accountable for an unacceptable waste of public money. However, scandals linked to the president, such as Nkandla and



"There is certainly a pressing need for aggressive voter education to get the youth to register to vote and make their mark."

In 1994, millions of South African expressed their right to vote in the first democratic election. In 2014, will the youth do the same?

Guptagate,⁴ are certain to affect public attitudes. Even before these scandals, the 2012 Afrobarometer survey⁵ revealed that the percentage of respondents who believed that "most or all officials working in the presidency are corrupt" had more than doubled, from 17% in 2007 to 35% in 2011.

With the 2014 South African national general elections on the horizon, political parties are going to be hard pressed to convince young people that they can address their concerns in exchange for their votes. In this election, the 'born frees' (citizens who were born around the beginning of democracy and have no memory of apartheid) could have a significant impact on the results. In total, the number of possible first-time voters under 24 years of age constitutes about seven million people, or 22% of the estimated 31 million potential voters. Almost two million are currently aged 18 and 19.

The challenges faced by these young people, such as the high levels of youth unemployment, poverty and corruption, could dictate whether or how they participate in the 2014 elections. Typically, young people tend to hold the same political views as their parents and therefore vote along similar lines. However, there are indications that this may be less of a factor in the next election. Interestingly, the IJR 2012 survey found that a majority (58%) of young people would consider joining a different political party than the one they had previously supported.

Corruption a key issue

There is no doubt that tackling corruption will become a key issue around which the various political parties will campaign in the run-up to the 2014 election. The ANC's unwillingness to hold its senior members accountable for stealing and misusing public money will be used against it by most opposition parties. The ANC, in turn, will try to highlight that it took various resolutions at its Mangaung national conference⁶ to address corruption in the party. However, some of these resolutions, such as the requirement that ANC members step down when facing criminal charges, have not been implemented, as is evidenced by the high-profile multimillion rand corruption case against Northern Cape ANC provincial chairperson and

Finance MEC John Block.⁷

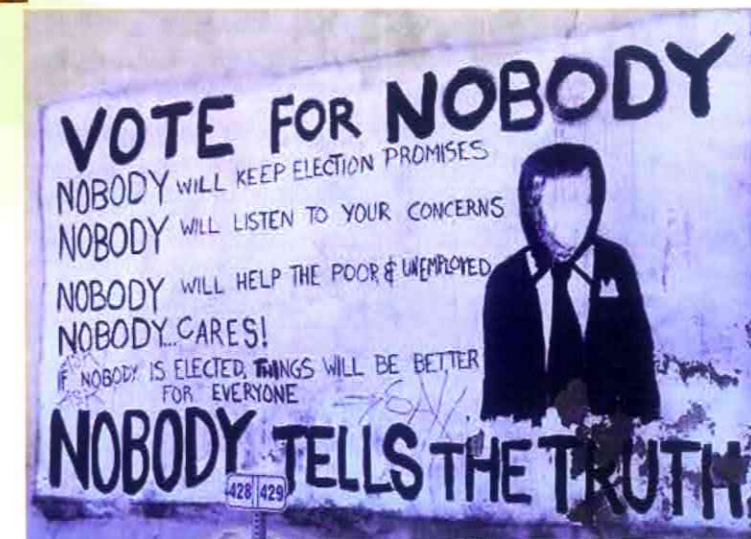
The ANC will also point to what it will frame as the government's aggressive stance on combating corruption. A recent example was when Justice minister Jeff Radebe released the names of 42 convicted fraudsters,⁸ suggesting that this would deter people from engaging in corruption. However, the survey conducted by Pondering Panda in March 2013 shows that this action may be inadequate for many of the young people in South Africa. While the youth are supportive of naming and shaming corrupt politicians, 40% think it will not change anything. Indeed, there is no evidence that such initiatives have any effect, as most people who commit fraud do not expect to get caught. Furthermore, the 2012 National Victims of Crime Survey⁹ reveals that only 28% of victims of fraud report this crime to the police.

Confusion and apathy

While the youth's confidence in political leaders is declining, it is far from clear whether the issue of corruption will influence their voting behaviour. In the most recent survey conducted by Pondering Panda in June among 1 507 respondents between the ages of 18 and 24, a majority appeared not to understand that political corruption was a barrier to service delivery. The survey illustrated that an estimated 60% of respondents felt that the ANC was the more corrupt party when compared to the DA. However, 41% of young black South Africans still felt that the ruling party would do a better job at service delivery, compared to 17% who felt the DA would. This may be because most black youth live in areas where their only experience of service delivery has been from the ANC.

Aggressive education crucial

While the youth have an immense opportunity to influence South Africa's political landscape, the biggest obstacle to achieving this is apathy. Only 10% of those aged 18 and 19 are registered to vote and 35% agree with the statement that "it is better not to vote than to change parties". There is certainly a pressing need for aggressive voter education to get the youth to register to vote and make their mark. ❀



Lauren Tracey is a researcher in the Governance, Crime and Justice Division at the Institute for Security Studies in Pretoria. The article first appeared on the institute's website (see <http://www.issafrica.org/>) on 25 June 2013. It appears here with the author's kind permission.

References:

1. See <http://www.ponderingpanda.com/>.
2. See <http://www.ijr.org.za/>.
3. Nkandla is President Jacob Zuma's private residential homestead in KwaZulu-Natal, which allegedly cost more than R200 million to upgrade. See, for example, <http://ewn.co.za/2013/06/21/Nkandla-report-top-secret>.
4. 'Guptagate' involved the controversial landing of a privately chartered plane at the Waterkloof Air Force Base in Pretoria in 2013. See, for example, http://cdn.mg.co.za/content/documents/2013/05/22/waterkloof_report.pdf.
5. See <http://reconciliationbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/2012-SA-Reconciliation-Barometer-FINAL>.
6. See, for example, <http://mg.co.za/article/2013-01-11-00-grand-slam-for-zuma-but-what-about-the-poor>.
7. See, for example, <http://www.bdlive.co.za/national/politics/2013/08/02/northern-cape-premier-defends-decision-to-keep-block-in-executive>.
8. See, for example, <http://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-courts/radebe-names-shames-fraudsters-1.1529541#.UbiMvdJK1H8Y>.
9. See <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0341/P03412012.pdf>.