

**The effect of the electoral institutions on voter turnout in South African elections: A zoom-in on the electoral participation patterns of the electorate in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) 2011 local elections.**

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**November, 2014**

**As the Candidate's Supervisor I agree to the submission of this thesis**

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## Abstract

Electoral systems have far-reaching political consequences in representative democracies and are arguably the cornerstone of electoral democracies. A country's electoral system directly determines among other things the inclusiveness, representativeness and by implication the credibility and legitimacy of the political system. This paper explores the relationship between the electoral system and electoral participation levels in South Africa focusing on the 2011 local elections. Voter turnout in the local elections has been worryingly low and may undermine the democratic gains made since the demise of apartheid in 1994. This analysis opines that the mechanical features of the mixed electoral system used for local elections in South Africa may exert certain psychological effects on the political parties and the voters alike, thus affecting their propensity to participate in the elections. The electoral formula, proportionality, district magnitude, the effective number of parties and the threshold of representation influence the nature of competition and more importantly the election outcome. Using a regression analysis based on the 2011 municipal election results in KwaZulu Natal (KZN) province in South Africa the study finds that there is indeed a relationship between these features and voter turnout patterns in the various local municipalities in the province. The results show that the electoral system may not be the only factor affecting turnout rates in the elections, but it is nevertheless an important. The manipulability of electoral systems offers the electoral engineers and policymakers a chance to improve turnout in the local elections.

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## Glossary

<b>ACDP</b>	<b>African Christian Democratic Party</b>
<b>AIC</b>	<b>African Independent Congress</b>
<b>ANC</b>	<b>African National Congress</b>
<b>AV</b>	<b>Alternative Vote</b>
<b>BV</b>	<b>Block Vote</b>
<b>CBO</b>	<b>Community Based Organisation</b>
<b>COGTA</b>	<b>Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs</b>
<b>DA</b>	<b>Democratic Alliance</b>
<b>DM</b>	<b>District magnitude</b>
<b>FC</b>	<b>Federal Congress</b>
<b>FPTP</b>	<b>First Past The Post</b>
<b>GKSA</b>	<b>Greater Kongress of South Africa</b>
<b>IDEA</b>	<b>International Democratic Electoral Assistance</b>
<b>IEC</b>	<b>Independent Electoral Commission</b>
<b>IFP</b>	<b>Inkatha Freedom Party</b>
<b>IPP</b>	<b>Index Political Participation</b>
<b>LGTA</b>	<b>Local Government Transition Act</b>
<b>LV</b>	<b>Limited Vote</b>
<b>MDB</b>	<b>Municipal Demarcation Board</b>
<b>MMD</b>	<b>Multi-Member District</b>
<b>NE</b>	<b>Effective number of elective parties</b>
<b>NFP</b>	<b>National Freedom Party</b>
<b>NGO</b>	<b>Non-Governmental Organisations</b>
<b>NP</b>	<b>Effective number of parliamentary parties</b>
<b>PR</b>	<b>Proportional Representation</b>
<b>SADC</b>	<b>South African Democratic Convention</b>
<b>SALGA</b>	<b>South African Local Government Association</b>
<b>SES</b>	<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>
<b>SMD</b>	<b>Single Member District</b>

<b>SNTV</b>	<b>Single Non-Transferable Vote</b>
<b>StatsSA</b>	<b>Statistics South Africa</b>
<b>STV</b>	<b>Single Transferable Vote</b>
<b>TA</b>	<b>Truly Alliance</b>
<b>TRS</b>	<b>Two-Round System</b>
<b>VAP</b>	<b>Voting Age Population</b>
<b>VEP</b>	<b>Voting Eligible Population</b>
<b>VTO</b>	<b>Voter Turnout</b>

## CHAPTER 1

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Introductory Remarks: electoral system-voter turnout nexus

Institutions play a subtle but nevertheless an important role in structuring political processes and shaping the choices of political actors. Broadly speaking, institutions are the ‘rules of the game’ according to which political players make their choices and strategies in the hope of achieving certain outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Thus institutions define and set the bounds within which political actors can manoeuvre. Perhaps nowhere in politics is the significance of institutions more evident (even more important) than in mass-based, large-scale political processes like elections. The electoral process is a highly institutionalised process governed by a set of electoral rules specifying the ‘terms and conditions’ of engagement political players are expected to adhere to. Electoral rules, like any other institutions, influence not only the behaviour and the choices of actors or agents or agents taking part in the election, but the character of the election<sup>2</sup> as well. Moreover, while electoral systems are not specifically or primarily designed to boost participation: the level of voter participation in the elections is an important collateral effect of electoral system structure (Blais and Aarts, 2006: 184). Thus the institutional context may be an important factor in explaining variations and dynamics characterising political processes like elections:

As a discipline, political science has always been able to legitimately claim that the study of two things, power and institutions, have been at the core of its concerns and contribution. Institutions are important, because, as entities, they form such a large part of the political landscape, and because modern governance largely occurs in and through institutions. Institutions also matter because they (or at least actors within them) typically wield power and mobilise institutional resources in political struggles and governance relationships. Institutions are also said to matter because they are seen as shaping and constraining political behaviour and decision making and even the perceptions and powers of political actors in a wide range of ways. Hence, in institutional terms, students of politics have analysed party systems, the rules of electoral competition, government bureaucracies, parliaments, constitutions, the

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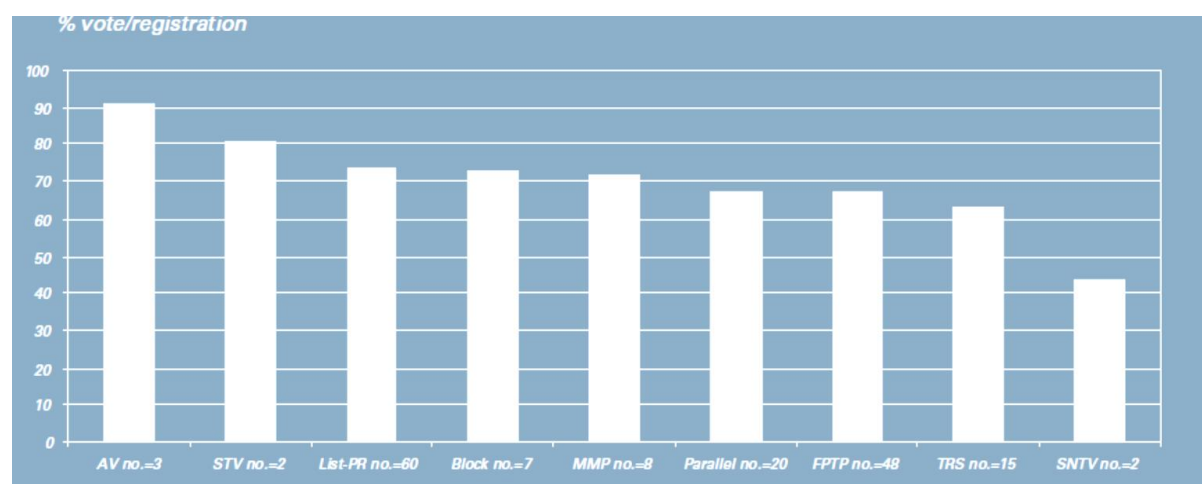
<sup>1</sup> Shepsle (2005:1) characterises institutions as a script that names the actors, their respective behavioural repertoires (or code of conduct), the sequence in which the actors choose from them, the information they possess when they make their selections, and the outcome resulting from the combination of actor choices. He argues that once we add actor evaluations of outcomes to this mix – actor preferences – we transform the game form into a game.

<sup>2</sup> Character of the elections may include the number of parties that take part in the elections, strategies and policies pursued by the contestants, the level of competition and tone of campaign by political parties and the level of participation by the voters inter alia.

judicial system, as well as large institutional complexes made up of the government and the gamut of public institutions we call the ‘state’ (Bell, 2002: 1).

With this in mind, the principal objective of this research endeavour is to dictate and discuss evidence of a relationship or lack thereof between the mechanics of the electoral system and voter participation dynamics in South Africa’s local elections. The study casts light on a tiny strand of the broader institutionalism paradigm<sup>3</sup> focusing on how electoral systems may affect the propensity of voters to participate or not participate in the elections. Pereira and Silva (2007: 101) point out that electoral systems are perhaps the most consequential set of rules in representative democracies and thus have multiple far-reaching political consequences. One of those political consequences, the present study maintains, is the level of electoral participation or interest in the elections by the voters. Previous studies have established a direct link between certain features of the electoral system and the structure and intensity of competition among the contestants, the decisiveness of the election, the outcome - inter alia (Gallego et al, 2011; Norris, 2003; Barwig, 2009). A decisive and highly competitive election is likely to trigger widespread interest from the voters and the parties alike and is therefore likely to be highly subscribed in terms of voter participation (Riker and Ordeshook, 1968: 27; Jackman, 1987: 407).

**Figure 1: Electoral systems and voter turnout around the world**



Source: Pintor, Gratschew and Sullivan (2005: 88). Voter turnout rates from a comparative perspective. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Institutionalism is an approach to the study of social, economic and political phenomena that subscribes to the idea that institutions are the primary determinants of the choices made by actors in these different spheres. In other words institutional theorists argue that social, economic and political choices are shaped, mediated and channelled by institutional arrangements (Kamel, 2009: 79).

A cursory glance at the relationship between electoral participation and the type of electoral systems shows that in general countries using Proportional Representation (PR) systems record higher voter turnout rates than countries using first-past-the-post (FPTP) systems (Norris, 1997; Blais and Aarts, 2006; Endersby and Kriekhaus, 2008). As shown in Figure 1 above more proportional systems like the Alternative Vote (AV), Single Transferable Vote (STV) and List PR seem to attract high voter turnout. Disproportional systems like FPTP and the Single-Non Transferable Vote (SNTV) seem to be accompanied by lower voter turnout rates in comparison. Whether the relationship between these two variables is negative or positive (if it exists at all); whether it is a result of causation or just a spurious correlation, at this stage remains a moot point – and is what this research endeavour sets out to clarify. The study undertakes to problematize the relationship between electoral institutions and electoral participation (ordinarily referred to as voter turnout) in the KZN 2011 local elections in South Africa. That is - how and to what extent the workings or particular features of the electoral system shapes the political playing field and constrain or facilitate participation in the elections. The relationship between these two variables has long been subjected to rigorous inquiry by generations of scholars spawning a great deal of scholarship (Powell, 1982; Jackman, 1987; Jackman and Miller, 1995; Norris, 1997; Blais and Dobryznska, 1998, Blais and Aarts, 2006).

This study concedes that electoral laws are only one in a long list factors that wield considerable influence on turnout. Among the numerous variables or factors that have been found to affect electoral turnout are the level or the order of the election in question<sup>4</sup>, historical circumstances, socio-economic development, social demographics and political culture<sup>5</sup> (Brady et al, 1995; Geys, 2006). But more importantly, perhaps because central to the present study, turnout is also significantly influenced by the type of electoral system being used to conduct an election (Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998; Endersby and Kriekhaus, 2008; Norris, 2003). Mainstream literature has pointed out the different ways in which the mechanics of the electoral system may exert psychological effects on political agents and voters and thus affect their behaviour towards the elections. The (dis)proportionality of the vote-seat correspondence, the ballot structure, the threshold of representation, the party

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<sup>4</sup> The level or order of an election concerns whether it is national, supra-national as in Europe where elections are held for the European parliament or local/municipal. Oftentimes these elections are classified as first-order, second-order and third order respectively.

<sup>5</sup> Branson et al (2009) Political culture denotes people's collective orientation, attitudes, shared and learned beliefs about their political system and their role within that system observed over a long period of time usually spanning generations.

system and the structure of the competition between the parties are some of the ways in which the electoral system is thought to affect electoral participation (Chen, 2011; Gallego et al, 2012; Franklin, 2004).

The relationship between the two variables is not a straightforward one. The literature presents mixed (if noisy) findings on the direction and the extent to which the structure of the electoral system shapes the levels and dynamics of electoral participation in different contexts. Some studies find turnout to be higher in PR systems and lower in FPTP systems, while some studies find no relationship or the reverse to be true in other settings (Ladner and Milner, 1999: 245; Barwig, 2007: 301). Most of the studies in industrial democracies find the electoral systems to be closely and positively related to turnout levels (Jackman, 1987; Powell, 1986) and studies focusing on developing countries find insignificant or no relationship at all (Perez-Linan, 2001; Blais and Dobrynska, 1998; Kostadinova, 2003). This implies that context - temporal and spatial – also matters in the relationship between electoral rules and voter participation.

The relationship between the electoral systems and rates of electoral participation in the African context remains poorly understood as evidenced by the dearth of literature addressing the subject on the continent. This is possibly because elections are a relatively new phenomenon in the continent having taken root in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Pottie, 2001: 27). The low levels of electoral participation recorded in most African countries are detrimental to the democratisation effort and this can be realistically remedied through careful adjustment of the existing electoral systems (Kersting, 2006: 136). Hence this study seeks to shed more light on the problem of low electoral participation especially in local level elections in South Africa. It will also attempt to proffer solutions on how institutions can be reconfigured to maximise their capacity to facilitate and boost participation in the elections.

## 1.2 The importance of elections and electoral participation

The status of elections or the electoral process as the linchpin or the cornerstone of modern democracies has been well argued and is well documented and for that reason is perhaps well beyond dispute (Kersting, 2006: 135-6 ; Adejumobi, 2000: 60). Elections and participation are organically linked and the existence of each depends on the existence of the other. Elections serve as a pivotal instrument designed to express and simultaneously reinforce the principles (representation, equality and participation) on which democracy is founded. Indeed Schumpeter (1947: 270-71) takes elections to be synonymous with democracy itself defining



democracy as the opportunity for people to choose their governors. Elections perform many vital functions essential for the survival of democracy.

Firstly, getting leaders to contest in regular competitive elections promotes accountability on the part of the leaders and improve their responsiveness to the governed (Cho, 2006: 3). Thus elections become a means by which the performance of the leaders is assessed and evaluated by the people through voting for or against the leaders' stay in power (Mangu and Budeli, 2007: 107). Secondly, elections help to resolve the issue of leadership succession by abolishing individual claims or entitlements to power. They thus ensure that power is shared among the citizens and everyone has equal access to government or positions of influence. Moreover, elections are a way of legitimising and getting popular support for the government, the leaders and the political system as a whole (Cho, 2006: 4; Czesnik (2006: 452). Without widespread public support there will be a crisis of authority and thus democracy would be unsustainable. Elections are also a means of promoting political stability by ensuring a peaceful and orderly transfer of power from one individual or group to another especially in post-conflict states (Mangu and Budeli, 2007: 108; Kunhe, 2010: 2).<sup>6</sup> A recurring theme among the various functions of elections is the participation of the citizens or at least the majority of the people. Low participation in the elections by the public questions and undermines the usefulness of elections (Kersting, 2006: 136). More importantly the 'one-man, one vote' philosophy behind elections reinforces the principle of equality between citizens and the freedom of the individual. This being the case, the value of elections is not simply instrumental (as a means to an end) but is also normative as well - as they constitute a basic human right.

The self-evident importance of elections perhaps explains the long-standing scholarly interest in electoral participation - the most popular mass-based form of political participation - in political science literature spanning generations. Political participation has indeed been at the crux of the democratic theory having been the central theme of the major works of a distinguished breed of scholars of democracy like Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762), Joseph

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<sup>6</sup> Elections have played a vital role in ushering in political stability in conflict-ridden countries like Angola, Mozambique, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Currently fresh elections are seen as the ultimate solution to stop the ongoing conflicts in countries like Syria, Central African Republic, Sudan and Ukraine. Syrian elections in June 2014 helped to put an end to a deadly three-year civil war (See <http://www.nytimes.com>, See also Berrian, H., 'Elections as means to peace: The Case of Central African Republic, Consultancy Africa Intelligence, 22 August 2014, <http://www.consultancyafrica.com>).

Schumpeter (1943) and Robert Dahl (1971) among others<sup>7</sup>. This is not surprising considering that around 117<sup>8</sup> countries in the world conduct elections in one form or another (Gresser, 2012). The major reason for this sustained interest in electoral participation may well be that: as Jackman (1987: 405) correctly observes - “more people vote than engage in any other type of routinized mass political behaviour”.

The *raison d’être* of democracy in the first place is to promote collective and inclusive participation in politics as a way of making it public-centred rather than just a preserve of a privileged few. Thus elections - more than any other political process - provide the biggest platform through which citizens can exert their weight or influence on the politics of their country (Cho, 2006: 4). Hence the importance attached to voter participation in electoral research and democratic theory. Barone and de Blasio (2011: 5) argue that lack of participation is indicative of the lack of representativeness of the democratic system and undermines the quality and the spirit of the democratic process. Voter turnout in elections is a direct and reliable measure of political participation in possibly the most important of political processes in contemporary democracies (Franklin, 2004). It is a reliable indicator and measure of the public’s attitudes towards a particular political institution and a particular political process. The level of voter participation speaks volumes about the credibility and quality of the electoral process, and is indeed a direct reflection of the quality of the electoral institutions in place (Kersting, 2006: 134). Electoral participation also, albeit indirectly, influences the structure and size of the government, income distribution and government efficiency (Barone and de Blasio, 2011). As such, the participation of every citizen in the elections is of paramount importance especially in democratising countries like South Africa (Dahl 1971; Schumpeter 1943; Kavanagh 1983; Bartels 2008; Czesnik 2006). Moreover, participation in the elections is also a measure of the degree of voters’ awareness or sense of civic duty as citizens.

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<sup>7</sup> Although these scholars offered different and sometimes conflicting views on how to go about the participation of the masses in politics – they all agree that participation is a *sine qua non* for democracies. Schumpeter (1944) favours an indirect democracy in which the participation of the masses is limited to electing the leaders. Rousseau (1762) and Dahl (1971) in their treatises of democracy favoured participation beyond elections. They argue that every important decision should be tabled before the masses and mechanisms put in place to ensure the people decide on what they want themselves rather than reserving those decisions for the elite.

<sup>8</sup> According to Freedom House rankings in 2012, 117 countries in the world could be classified as electoral democracies conducting regular free and fair elections under a multi-party system in which all the competing parties have equal access to the media and are free to campaign. This translates to more than two-thirds of the world’s population living in electoral democracies.

That said, an inquiry into the factors that affect voter turnout or the level of electoral turnout is by no means a trivial affair. A logical link exists between turnout levels and election outcomes (Czesnik, 2006; Kersting, 2009; Blais, 2000). The number of people casting their votes in the elections directly determines the distribution of seats to the contesting parties especially in the PR systems. By implication it also determines the balance of power among the political parties and the representativeness of elected bodies like the local councils in South Africa. The outcome has far-reaching and important implications for both the electorate and the politicians vis-à-vis the policies pursued by the government and who gets to benefit from the policies (Barone and de Blasio, 2011; Endersby and Kriekhaus, 2008). Low and high voter participation rates, argues Czesnik (2006: 456-7), may mean different things in different contexts. While low participation may indicate a “democratic deficit” in some countries in yet other countries or contexts it may be interpreted as sign of satisfaction by the public (ibid: 457). Overall, it is important that an enabling environment is created for the potential voters to fully participate in the electoral processes. And since elections largely take place within the auspices of the electoral system, it is highly probable that the solution to low participation rates may lie in the reconfiguration of the electoral rules.

Scholarship on electoral participation is divided into various schools of thought, each employing a unique strategy of explanation for the variation of voter turnout levels across different countries or different areas within a country. These include the sociological model (Lazarsfeld et al, 1944), the psychological/Michigan model (Campbell, Angus and Kahn, 1952), the institutional model (Powell, 1982; Jackman, 1987) and the rational choice model (Downs 1957; Riker and Ordeshook, 1968). The camps have advocated different ways and approaches in studying voter turnout and thus have contributed in different but nonetheless equally important ways to the understanding of voting participation dynamics. This study will tap into this wealth of scholarship with a view to connecting existing understanding of voter turnout dynamics with the central hypothesis of this inquiry – which is that electoral institutions do influence voter turnout variations.

### 1.3 A glance on the context

Using the voter turnout rates and dynamics in 2011 local elections in the KwaZulu Natal (KZN) province in South Africa as a case-study, this paper delves deeper into the debate on electoral participation with a particular focus on the effect or the role of the electoral rules and institutions. South Africa has conducted five national and provincial elections and four local government elections since the inception of democracy in 1994. The national and local

elections are conducted under different electoral systems<sup>9</sup>. The national election uses the proportional representation system (PR) whereas in the local government elections a mixed system is used whereby 50% of the representatives are elected through single-member or ward-based districts and the remaining 50% are elected through the PR system (Mottiar, 2005: 9; See also the Independent Electoral Commission website, <http://www.elections.org.za>). The study analyses the electoral turnout patterns in the 2011 municipal elections in the 50 local municipalities clustered under 10 district municipalities and one metropolitan municipality<sup>10</sup> with a view to casting more light on the influence of the electoral system on voter turnout.

While much has been said regarding the dominance of the ANC in the elections, scant attention has been paid to the factors that facilitate or hinder electoral participation (Fauvelle-Aymar 2008, p. 142). Much less has been said about the effect of electoral rules and institutions and how they affect voter turnout. This dearth of scholarship on the relationship between electoral laws and turnout in South Africa is a cause for concern especially in a young democracy like South Africa seeking to consolidate a democratic culture. Most pertinently then; at the heart of the present inquiry is the question: in what ways and to what extent does the electoral system design or the set of electoral laws affect electoral participation? Barwig (2009: 228) points out that electoral systems have certain psychological effects on the parties' calculus of mobilisation and on the voters' calculus of participation and thus affect turnout rates.

The pivotal assumption of this research inquiry is that political participation in general and electoral participation in particular is not only a function of individual attitudes and social make-up but is also affected by the relevant political institutions as well. Put simply, political participation is by and large, an institutionalised process, hence the design of the institutions has a direct impact on how the processes work. Franklin (2004: 4) advises that in investigating voter turnout it is important to channel attention to the character of the election as much as the features of the electorate. As such, using an aggregate-level approach, this

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<sup>9</sup> Nkiwane (2008) points out that an electoral system generally consists of rules and regulations, procedures and laws (the mechanics) which govern the way voters exercise their right to vote and how votes are translated into the number of seats for a political party in the National Assembly. Electoral systems are generally classified into broad categories like the majoritarian or pluralitarian, mixed system and proportional representation systems. However there are numerous variations within these different categories regarding how electoral constituencies are delimited, how votes are translated into and the ballot structure amongst other things.

<sup>10</sup> The Local government handbook: A complete guide to municipalities in South Africa, available at <http://www.localgovernment.co.za>

paper will endeavour to add another dimension to the raging debate on electoral turnout by investigating the impact of the electoral system or electoral rules on electoral turnout in South African local elections. Jackman (1987: 405) rightly points out that voting is everywhere systematically governed by institutions and laws that vary from country to country and for this reason institutions will no doubt have an impact on the level of voter turnout.

Blais and Dobrzynska (1998: 245) also argue that voting is a political act and turnout depends not only on socio-economic factors but also on how elections and politics more broadly are structured. This study takes advantage of South Africa's use of a mixed electoral system for the local government elections in order to gain insight into the relationship between levels of voter turnout and the type of electoral institutions used to conduct elections. The use of a mixed system provides a unique opportunity to explore how the different mechanical and psychological effects of the proportional and majoritarian systems work together to influence turnout.

Electoral laws stipulate the delimitation and size of electoral districts, the voting system or the ballot structure, the threshold of representation, and the number of seats to be contested. As such the electoral rules shape the political playing field in favour of or against one or another party or segment of the electorate. For example single-member constituencies are believed to favour large parties with huge amount of support while working against smaller parties with dispersed support (Endersby and Kriekhaus, 2008: 602). The different functions of the system presents incentives and disincentives for voters and parties to participate in or stay away from the elections (Norris, 2003: 3).

#### 1.4 Electoral participation patterns in South Africa

South Africa held its first democratic election with universal suffrage in 1994 after the demise of the apartheid system in which elections were a reserve of a privileged minority as the majority of citizens were excluded from the process. As such as an electoral democracy the country is still young or at best a 'work in progress'. Thus far the country has had 5 national elections (1994, 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014) and four local government elections (1995, 2000, 2006, and 2011). An observation of electoral participation patterns of the electorate in post-apartheid South Africa presents an interesting, if worrying, picture.

**Table1: showing turnout percentages in the national and local elections held thus far**

National Elections (1994-2014)		Local government elections(1995-2011)	
Year	Turnout %	Year	Turnout%
1994	86	1995	49
1999	89	2000	48
2004	76.7	2006	48.4
2009	77	2011	57.64
2014	73	2016	??

Source: Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)

A cursory glance at the voter turnout figures in table 1 above shows a huge gap in the turnout between national elections and local elections with the latter recording lower turnout rates averaging just around 50%. In the last five general elections South Africa has had modest but varying levels of turnout reaching a high of 86% in 1994, rising slightly to 89% in 1999, 76.7% in 2004 and rising again slightly to 77% in 2009 (Kersting 2009, p. 128) and 73% in 2014<sup>11</sup>. The local government elections have recorded much lower turnout rates. Turnout was a mere 48% in 2000 before rising slightly to 48.4% in 2006 and then rising quite sharply by over 9 percentage points to 57.64% (IEC 2014) although still far from the levels recorded in the national elections. Local elections and national elections are equally important and this gap in the voter turnout rates between these elections merits further investigation. Hence this study casts a spotlight on the otherwise understudied but highly culpable role of the electoral laws in influencing or shaping the levels of turnout in the national and local elections.

**Table2: Voter turnout by province in 2000, 2006 and 2011 local government elections**

Province	2000 %Voter turnout	2006 %Voter turnout	2011 %Voter turnout
Eastern Cape	55.45	56.06	58.16
Free State	48.36	47.24	55.22
Gauteng	42.78	42.47	55.77
KwaZulu Natal	45.97	50.57	61.53
Limpompo	42.33	44.74	50.05
Mpumalanga	43.02	46.35	55.80
North West	43.90	45.63	53.47
Northern Cape	55.09	53.50	63.36

<sup>11</sup> Election results report by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), <http://www.elections.org.za>

Western Cape	57.15	51.78	64.37
<b>Total</b>	<b>47.33</b>	<b>48.40</b>	<b>57.64</b>

Source: Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa, <http://www.elections.org.za>

Table 2 above presents quite interesting trends in terms of electoral participation. Three provinces: the Western Cape, Northern Cape and Eastern Cape have the highest participation rates in the local elections recording over 50% in the last three elections. In 2000 and 2006 elections, only 3 and 4 provinces out of 9 managed to attract above 50% voter turnout. In 2011 it was a significantly improved showing with all the provinces posting above 50% voter turnout and a record average of 57%. KwaZulu Natal - the province of interest - has experienced a moderate turnout posting 45%, 50% and 61% turnout in 2000, 2006 and 2011 respectively. The rates shown in this table are unacceptably low, at least compared to the national elections. This study is interested in the relationship, if any, between the electoral rules used for the local elections and the observed variations in levels of turnout.

#### 1.4.1 Voter turnout: From another angle

While the figures shown in table 1 and 2 above may indicate a highly participatory culture especially in the national elections, a closer look on the voting turnout and the voting age population presents a more worrisome picture. The above figures indicate turnout measured as a percentage of people who registered to vote. Such measurements are likely to inflate voter turnout since they leave out people who did not register to vote (McKinley, 2014). Since 1994, South Africa's estimated eligible voting-age population (VAP)<sup>12</sup>, has increased by over 8 million people over a 20-year period owing to population growth, outgrowing the number of registered voters (*ibid*). There has been a growing amount of what McKinley (2014) calls the "stay away vote" as more people, especially the youth, are abstaining from the elections.

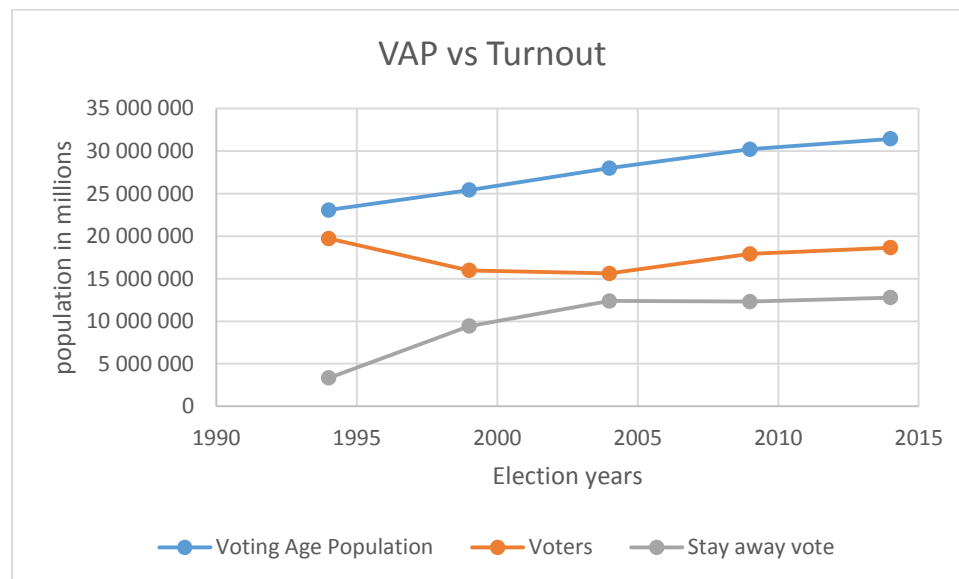
Figure 1 below shows quite interesting trends in the voting behaviour of the South African electorate. The gap between the voting age population and the number of voters who turnout to vote has widened since 1994 meaning the number of eligible voters who do not vote has been increasing. The number of people who turnout to cast their votes is failing to catch up with growth in the number of people above the voting age of 18. The gap between the stay

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<sup>12</sup> VAP refers to the number of eligible citizens who are 18 years old and above. It is calculated based on the 2011 census data released by Statistics South Africa.

away vote and the number of voters who turnout to vote has been narrowing raising fears that the number of people who do not participate in the elections will soon eclipse those who participate. Between 1999 and 2004, registered voters increased by 2.5 million to 20.7 million voters. Yet, according to VAP figures in 2004, approximately 6.8 million potential voters remained unregistered.<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 2: shows how voter turnout measures up to the VAP growth over the years and the stay away vote**



Source: compiled by the author using statistics from Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) and the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)

In 2009, registered voter numbers increased again, from 20.7 million to 23.2 million people but again approximately 6.8 million potential voters remained unregistered. While of the 23 million who registered to vote only 15.6 million turned out to vote with almost 7 million registered voters staying away. According to these figures, 77.4% of all eligible voters were registered to vote in the 2009 elections.

In 2014 it was estimated that the voting age population (VAP) in South Africa was over 31 million<sup>14</sup> yet only 25 million people registered to vote in the 2014 national elections. Of the 25 million registered voters only 18 million actually turned out to vote. Cast in terms of the VAP this means that over 40% of eligible citizens abstained from the election. For the

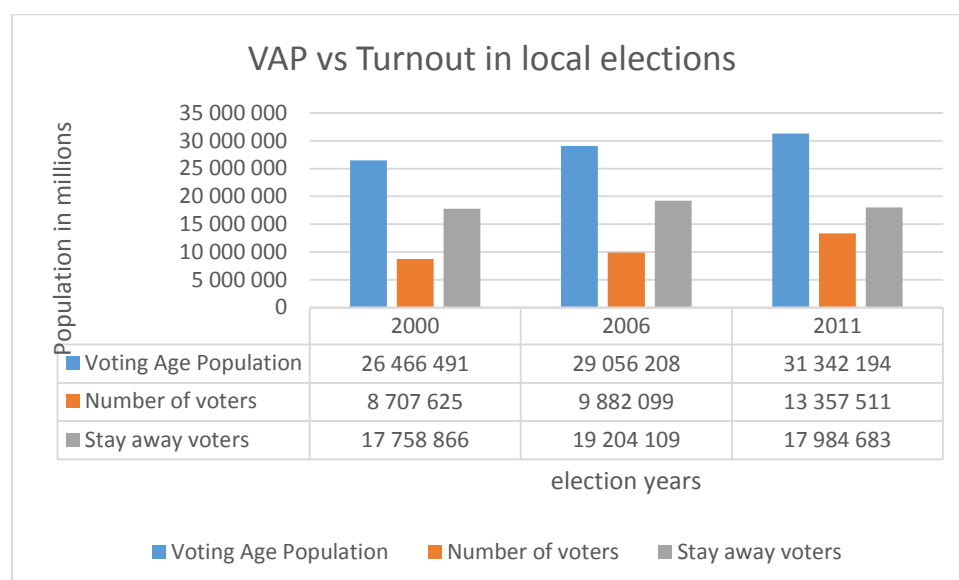
<sup>13</sup> Herzenberg, C.S. 2011. Voter turnout key to local elections', <http://www.sabc.co.za>

<sup>14</sup> Statistics South Africa, 2013 population estimates, <http://www.statssa.org.za>



municipal elections, the figures are even exceedingly low as approximately only a quarter of the citizens participate in the elections.

**Figure 3: Shows the turnout in local elections measured against the VAP growth**



Source: calculated by the author using statistics from StatsSA and the Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC).

Looking more closely at VAP figures for the municipal elections over the years it shows that less than a third of the VAP cast their votes in 2000 and 2006 elections. There was an improvement in 2011 with close to 40% of the eligible population casting their votes. Moreover, as the table above shows the number of voters who stayed away in 2000 and 2006 elections was more than double the number of voters who actually turned out to vote. In 2011 this gap was reduced as more people turned out to vote although the gap remained significantly large. So, despite an increase in the number of registered voters, the registration rates, not to mention the turnout rates, for elections continue to be out-paced by population growth. Overall, when registration figures are compared against overall population growth in the VAP it appears that there is an increasing number of eligible voters who do not for some or other reason cast a vote at election time.

What the figures above indicate is by any standard a far-from-ideal situation in a country that seeks to consolidate and entrench its democracy. So many citizens abstaining from the elections symptomizes a broader problem in the system. The present study concedes that the

electoral institutions or systems are only one in a multitude of factors that influence these electoral participation patterns. Nonetheless the study conjectures that the electoral systems used to conduct these elections do play an important part, directly or indirectly, in shaping the overall turnout. That is the electoral laws are a significant factor in the propensity of the citizens to vote or not to vote and in the parties' motivation to mobilize support in the electorate and thus affecting turnout.

This study sets out to establish if there is any link between the institutional features like the electoral system on the one hand and the level of electoral turnout on the other in the elections and also suggest how these gaps can be bridged. Moreover, most studies of voter turnout tend to concentrate excessively on the numbers and percentages of voter turnout. The present study departs from this tradition and endeavours to engage the question of voter turnout from the quantitative as well as the qualitative perspectives. Thus, the study will attempt to make an assessment of the qualitative impact of voter turnout and the electoral system on the quality of democracy and also suggest possible remedies for the low level of voter turnout in the local elections.

### 1.5 Key research questions

Political participation, and particularly electoral participation, is the lifeblood of modern democracy (Franklin, 2007). It is also a phenomenon that scholars of democratic theory, perhaps more than any other phenomenon, have had to grapple with for ages. At the heart of the present study is an inquiry into or an interest in the nature and scope of influence electoral institutions have on electoral turnout rates. The study will, through the lens of the rational choice theory and the institutional model of voter turnout, undertake an incisive analysis of the voting participation trends in KZN municipal elections with a view to finding solutions for the low turnout rates. As such the present analysis will seek to find answers to the following questions:

- i. Do citizens and parties alike take into account the (dis)incentives of the electoral system in their decision to participate and mobilize supporters respectively?
- ii. How far can the rational choice and institutional theories of voter turnout explain the influence of the electoral institutions on electoral turnout rates?

- iii. Is there any systematic link between the type of the electoral system in place and the level of voter turnout in KZN local government elections?
- iv. In what way do the various features of the electoral system influence the parties' calculus of mobilization and voters' calculus of participation?
- v. How can the electoral infrastructure and the associated institutions be adjusted or redesigned to maximize their facilitative and motivational capabilities on voters' participation and political parties' mobilization?

### 1.6 Research problems and objectives: Broader issues to be investigated

Elections are central to modern democracy as they bring the democratic ideals of representation, participation and equality into practice. As such the importance of the level of electoral participation in consolidating democracy, especially in relatively new democracies like South Africa, cannot be over-emphasized. Classical political theorists like Robert Dahl, John Mills, Rousseau and Joseph Schumpeter all recognized the importance of citizen participation in the actualization of democracy. That said, an inquiry on the factors that affect electoral participation is no doubt a worthwhile exercise especially in the context of on-going democratization process in South Africa. Some of the most important and relevant aims of this research are:

- i. To delve deeper into the debate on what constitutes voter turnout and its vitality or lack of it for young democracies like South Africa.
- ii. To analyze variations in the rates of electoral participation in KZN's local municipalities through the lens of integrated rational choice and institutionalist models of voter turnout.
- iii. Endeavor to spell out the role and the significance or lack thereof of the electoral system in shaping voter turnout in local elections.
- iv. To assess the effect of different components of the electoral system structure on the level of turnout.
- v. To contribute to the understanding of the relationship between electoral rules and electoral participation and identify crucial areas for future research.

### 1.7 Significance of Study

It is important to stress – as a starting point – that this study does not pretend to provide a one-stop solution to voter apathy and the high abstention rates from the local elections in South Africa. It rather seeks to elucidate one key aspect of a multi-faceted and complex phenomenon. That is to try and demystify the relationship between electoral laws and electoral turnout. In doing so, contribute to the understanding of how the electoral institutions affect turnout and how they can be improved to remedy the low levels of electoral participation.

A major area of strength for this study is its focus on local elections which are often overlooked in the mainstream literature with national elections enjoying disproportionate attention. Local elections are as important as national elections and hence merit equal attention. Turnout in the municipal elections is seldom the subject or focus of electoral research yet citizens are more affected by local government policy than by national government policy. However, Muhlbock (2012: 2) rightly observes that communities play a pivotal role as “schools of democracy” and “centers of legitimization” of the entire political system. All the more, Gosnell (1927) argued that local elections make for ideal laboratories in the study of how to increase voter turnout (Green et al, 2003: 1083). This paper endeavors to fill in this gap by analyzing the causes and possible consequences and suggesting possible cures for the low voter turnout in the municipal elections in South Africa focusing on the district municipalities of KZN. In local politics citizens get an opportunity to learn about and become engaged in democratic processes and therefore acquire crucial democratic or civic engagement skills (Barone and de Blasio, 2011).

- Barometers of national political trends. Local elections are important for their role in a broader national democracy. Parties in South Africa can use local elections as a measure of their support going into the national elections.
- Determining what matters most to voters. Often issues in local elections are those that directly affect the daily lives of citizens; sometimes, local issues are the ones that voters care about most. The nature of contestation among parties and candidates, and the issues that arise, can be an important indicator of what voters care deeply about.
- Democratization process. Local elections may be used as a first step towards a country’s democratization process, as was the case in South Africa where local elections were used to democratise local government and redress the imbalances of the past in terms of service provision.
- Minority inclusion. Local elections can be highly useful for allowing minorities at the national level to find inclusion in a country’s political life in a local arena.
- Development of national party systems. There are also intricate linkages among local elections, party systems, and local level and national-level party system formation. In Nigeria, for example, party formation rules applied to the local elections in 1998 had a strong influence on the formation of the party system at the national level in Nigeria. (IDEA, 2000: 118).

The study is the first of its kind drawing attention to a key but neglected part of the South African political system. As such, this paper has the potential to trigger more research interest on the relationship between institutions and voting behavior which has largely been ignored. South Africa is in the midst of setting up strong foundations for its fledgling democracy and this research will help lift the lid on how the institutional paraphernalia affects participation patterns at the local level. It also addresses relevant practical issues since institutions like the electoral system can be redesigned to be more effective in terms of encouraging higher turnout in the elections. In this light, the findings of this study might be useful not only for students of electoral systems and electoral participation but for policymakers as well.

Participation in the South African local elections is extremely low, and low participation has various negative consequences from normative and empirical perspectives. Low levels of participation might indicate a crisis of democracy and a dearth of the sense of civic duty among the citizens (Barone and de Blasio (2011: 8). Moreover, low participation is believed to be linked to the deteriorating relationships between the government and the public, government corruption and incompetence and also exacerbates income inequality. Against this background, this study seeks to contribute to the knowledge of the dynamics of electoral participation in local elections with a view to finding lasting solutions to the high prevalence of apathy or abstention among the electorate.

Most of the previous studies on electoral participation in local elections have tended to concentrate much on how individual factors like race, education, class and profession affect turnout (Fauvelle-Aymar, 2008; Muhlbock, 2012). However this study will take a different turn by investigating how the characteristics of the elections as determined by the electoral institutions rather than the characteristics of the electorate, affect turnout. The reason for this is that it is easier to redesign the electoral institutions to encourage more participation than it is to change people's attitudes. Moreover, by focusing on the influence of the electoral system on voter turnout, this study contributes to the ongoing debate in South Africa as to which electoral system is better-suited for continued democratic development<sup>15</sup>. This paper

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<sup>15</sup> An Electoral Task Team was set up by the South African government in 2002. Its mandate was to assemble and analyse data on the legal framework, the South African context and consult relevant stakeholders among other things with a view to identifying a preferable electoral system for South Africa's national, provincial and local elections. The report is still being debated on.

will also offer suggestions on how best, institutionally, the low participation that we have witnessed in the last four local elections can be remedied.

### 1.8 Limitations of the Study

This study has the potential to interesting questions which may prove valuable in the academia and in policy-making. However, the study is fraught with limitations and weaknesses. Firstly, due mainly to time and financial constraints, this study is entirely a desktop-based research and relies entirely on secondary information. The findings of this study would have been stronger they were backed by interviews of the voters and parties in relation to how they view the electoral system. Moreover, the explanatory power of this study is reduced by its concentration on a single variable to explain voter turnout variations in a single province and on a particular year- 2011.

The model employed by this study would have been stronger if it had included previous elections and more provinces for in-depth comparison. However, the reason for focusing only on the 2011 elections is that it is possible that for the first two elections in 2000 and 2006 voters and the parties were still in the process of understanding the workings of the electoral system. Therefore the 2011 elections - which were the third elections - are likely to have more evidence of the psychological impact of the electoral system on the voters and the parties with regards to their decisions to turnout and to mobilize supporters respectively. While the inclusion of more provinces in this study would have improved the findings, it is nonetheless true that what this research finds about the impact of electoral rules on voter participation in KZN can be generalized to other provinces. This is because South Africa uses a uniform electoral system all over the country's provinces in the local elections.

### 1.9 Structure of the dissertation

#### *Chapter 1: General background to the study*

The first chapter will briefly touch on the main thesis of this research study. It will briefly discuss how the electoral system can affect voter turnout trends in the elections. The chapter will also spell out the main research questions and objectives of this study.

#### *Chapter 2: Literature review*

This chapter will take a step further and examine the extant literature on the topic of electoral systems and voter participation. Of particular interest in this chapter will be the

conceptualization of these two variables in the literature. Methodologies and findings of previous studies will be discussed.

#### *Chapter 3: The electoral system and local government in South Africa*

This chapter will discuss the structure of the local government in South Africa. That is, with regards to its functions and constitutional mandate. It will also discuss in detail the electoral system used for the country's local elections vis-à-vis ballot structure, method of seat allocation inter alia.

#### *Chapter 4: Theoretical framework*

The second chapter will dwell on the theoretical framework which will underpin the arguments raised in this study. Prominent theories of voter participation will be identified and discussed briefly pointing out their strengths and weaknesses in relation to the current study. The theoretical framework to guide this research will then be discussed in detail pointing how it aids the explanation of the relationship between the two variables of interest in this study.

#### *Chapter 5: Methodology and research design*

Chapter will spell out in detail the methodology which will be followed by this study. It will discuss the conceptualization and operationalization of the dependent variable (voter turnout) and the various independent variables (disproportionality, district size, quotas, and the party system). It will also discuss data collection and data analysis techniques.

#### *Chapter 6: Results and analysis*

Chapter 6 will present the results of the study. It will report on and interpret the collective impact of the specified independent variables on the dependent variable – voter turnout across the KZN province electoral districts.

#### *Chapter 7: Conclusion, recommendations and suggestions for further research*

The final chapter of the dissertation will summarize the findings of the study and present a final statement on the impact of the electoral system on voter participation. It will also include recommendations on how to make the electoral system as inclusive as possible in order to maximize involvement by both political parties and voters. The chapter will also point out areas in which the study could be done better and offer suggestions for future research.

### **1.10 Conclusion**

The roadmap to be followed in, and foundation of this research are pretty clear. This chapter briefly discussed how electoral rules are political instruments that exert considerable influence on the political playing field. Electoral systems have political consequences which

include the representativeness of the elected bodies, accountability of the politicians, the party system and voter participation inter alia. The chapter has also spelt out a plethora of interconnected objectives and research questions that this research intends to address which revolve around the main question of how electoral laws influence turnout levels in the elections. If the problem of low turnout in the local elections is to be dealt with effectively then electoral system configuration may be worth looking into. The next chapter will examine the existing scholarship on the topic focusing on the findings of the previous studies and their implications.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introductory remarks

Not so many fields of research in political science can rival the sheer magnitude and scope of scholarship that has been spawned by electoral research since the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed there is a ring of truth in Dennis Kavanagh's observation that "electoral participation research has grown so much so that it is sometimes used interchangeably with political participation" (1983: 217). Hence it is important that any research endeavour in this field be preceded by a review of the vast array of scholarship. In addition to an assessment of the state of electoral research, a survey of the existing literature provides a window through which to identify existing gaps within the literature. That said, this chapter will examine previous studies identifying, discussing and connecting the various themes and concepts that dominate the discourse in the field of electoral research. This section will shed more light on the history of electoral research and also how the previous studies spell out the relationship between electoral system design and the rates of electoral participation. It will also look at how previous literature has conceptualised the independent and dependent variables (the electoral system and voter turnout respectively) of this study. The various approaches and findings of past studies will also be discussed. Moreover this chapter will also discuss at length the methodological approach and the techniques that will inform the research design of the present study in terms of data collection and data analysis.

#### 2.2 Electoral research: A historical detour

Electoral research is a relatively new field in political science but, nonetheless, one of the most developed and sophisticated research bases in social science, with a history stretching over six decades (Thomassen, 1994: 241). This section gives a brief outline of the history of electoral research. It will highlight the influential studies that defined and in important ways continue to define and shape the scope and direction of research in this field. The purpose of this brief historical recount of electoral research is to try and put the present study into perspective and establish where it fits within the larger body of research in this field.

The origins of the studies on electoral behaviour can be traced down to Harold Gosnell's study of voting behaviour in the 1924 and 1925 local elections in Chicago (Green et al, 2003:

1085). The study sought to understand why voters often stay away from local elections than presidential elections. This was followed up by the landmark studies done in the late first half of the nineteenth century by Paul Lazarsfeld and associates at the University of Columbia in the United States. The studies later extended into the 1950s resulting in a number of books (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1948), (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, 1954) and (Lipset, Lazarsfeld, Barton and Linz, 1954) (Visser, 1996: 24). Their studies found that media content was of little significance in the people's voting choice in the presidential elections. Rather one's social background as relating to their education, religion, race and occupation among other things were more reliable indicators of their voting choice (Bartels, 2008:4).

The aim of the studies was to investigate the voting behaviour of the Americans in the presidential elections. Specifically, to determine the factors that influenced their voting choice of the voters in the elections. Their model of voting behaviour has been has been hugely influential and has been the basis of many studies in the quest to understand voting behaviour (Brady et al, 1995; Habib and Naidu, 2006; Basat and Dahan, 2008; Fauvelles-Aymar, 2008; Gerber et al, 2008; Funk, 2005). These studies are credited for developing the Sociological approach to the study of electoral behaviour. The major thesis of the Sociological school was that voting behaviour was largely a function of one's social situation or station vis-à-vis religion, age, education, class, place of residence and family among other factors.

There is an old adage in the American folklore to the effect that a person is only what he thinks he is, an adage which reflects the typically American notion of unlimited opportunity, the tendency towards self-betterment. Now we find that the reverse of the adage is true: a person thinks, politically, as he is, socially. Social characteristics determine political preference. (Lazarsfeld et al., 1968, p. 69)

As a result of these studies an Index of Political Predisposition (IPP) was developed in which religion, socio-economic status and area of residence were identified as the major determinants of electoral behaviour (Antunes, 2010: 147). The influence of the Sociological model, having waned in the 1950s, was rejuvenated in no small ways in the 1960s by Lipset and Rokkan's *Cleavage structures, Party systems and Voter alignments* (1967). In their work, Lipset and Rokkan argued that religion, culture and class were important factors in understanding people's political behaviour. In other ways this inquiry reinforced Lazarsfeld *et al* (1948)'s findings that one's political choice, and by implication – political participation – was greatly influenced by their social background. Moreover, Brady et al (1996)'s resource model of political participation, by and large corroborated and in some ways improved the

Sociological model as developed by Lazarsfeld and company. This model established that it is not simply one's social background but the resources (time, money and civic skills) they have at their disposal that significantly influence political participation including voting (Brady et al, 1995: 274). The major finding of the resource model of political participation was that time, money and civic skills were three primary factors influencing one's tendency to engage in political activities including the likelihood to vote or not to vote.

The second study of historical significance in electoral research was conducted at the University of Michigan in the United States began in 1948 and was later institutionalised and continues to the present (Visser, 1996: 24). It was largely a response to the weaknesses of the Sociological model which portrayed political behaviour as static and voters as passive actors rooted in their social surroundings. The study focused on the American presidential elections of 1952, 1956 and 1960 and culminated in a much acclaimed book *The American Voter* (Campbell et al 1960) (Bartels, 2008: 7). Also referred to as the party-identification or psychological model of voting behaviour, the Michigan study centred its analysis of electoral behaviour on political attitudes or people's psychological predisposition to the political world. It gave primacy to personal attributes like political interest as the more immediate and perhaps most powerful determinants of one's voting behaviour. Its main argument and major contribution was that people's voting behaviour is determined and shaped, to an important extent, by party attachment or partisanship (Campbell et al, 1960: 121). People are likely to vote for a party they are attached or go to vote if they think the party they are attached to, has a chance of winning the elections.

However even though attachment is a key factor, an individual's psychological make-up would influence them to behave in ways not entirely consistent or even outright opposite to their party attachment. Thomassen (1994: 239) points out that the model was so influential so much so that, "a whole generation of European scholars made the pilgrimage to Mecca to study political behaviour at the University of Michigan's Survey Research Centre". The study came up with the explanatory model known as the 'funnel of causality'. It demonstrated that seeking to understand people's political behaviour or their propensity to behave in a certain way by simply referring to their social background was merely scratching the surface of a more complex process. The explanatory framework of the Michigan approach distinguishes between distal factors (sociological) and proximal (personal) factors in explaining a person's voting behaviour. By focusing on the psychological aspect, the model is able, unlike the Sociological model, to explain why sometimes people vote for a party they are not attached to

or abstain from voting altogether. This model showed that people's political behaviour is a function of a more complex interaction of psychological and social processes cannot simply be reduced to their social situation (Bartel, 2008: 8). In other words, people are not just passive actors but actively decide whether to participate in politics or not and their political attitudes are not static. But constantly change in response to the political environment like the issues at stake and the candidates competing for office.

The other major work in electoral research was the rational choice theory of voter turnout, which was developed by Anthony Downs in his work *Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957) improved later on by Riker and Ordeshook (1968) and Edlin et al (2005) among others. The rational choice theory's analysis of political behaviour is based on an analogy of the behaviour of a consumer in the market. It is derived, by and large, from the principle of *utility maximization*<sup>16</sup> and stipulates that voters, like consumers, seek to maximise the utility of their vote (Bartels 2008: 19).

Our model could be described as a study of political rationality from an economic point of view. By comparing the picture of rational behaviour which emerges from this study with what is known about actual political behaviour, the reader should be able to draw some interesting conclusions about the operation of democratic politics (Downs, 1957:14).

The model rests on the assumption that voters are rational individuals whose likelihood to participate in the elections will be determined by the decisiveness of their vote and the choices at their disposal in the election (Antunes. 2010: 162). Downs (1957: 295) argues that the rational choice thesis is premised largely on the concept of rationality. Parties and voters alike seek to realise some profit or benefit from their actions and will therefore act in an instrumental manner. As a result rational choice theorists suggest that in order to boost turnout it is important that policymakers create an environment which reduces as much as possible the cost incurred by voters in the voting process. At the same time increase the possible benefits of voting.

However the theory came under heavy criticism for failing to explain why the majority of citizens still turnout to vote even though there little chance of their vote influencing the outcome (Blais 2000; Green and Shapiro, 1994). This was known as the paradox of voting

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<sup>16</sup> Utility maximisation is an economic concept that suggests that when making a decision to purchase something, a consumer attempts to get the greatest value possible from expenditure of least amount of money. His or her objective is to maximise total value derived from available money (See <http://www.businessdictionary.com>).

(Feddersen, 2004). Nevertheless this theory has been very influential in the field of electoral research and has been adopted and expanded by several scholars to improve its explanatory power. For example in an attempt to solve the paradox of voting Riker and Ordeshook (1968:28) add citizen duty as a motivational factor for the voter. Fiorin (1981) contends that voters are indeed rational as they adopt retrospective voting strategy as they vote. Other scholars (Feddersen and Sandroni, 2002; Edlin et al, 2005; Coate and Conlin, 2004) used group-based models approach to voter turnout in which they sought to substitute social interests for selfish interests as the main reason for a voter turning out to vote.

There were some other equally important developments in the literature on voter turnout. One such was Jackman (1987)'s fairly influential institutionalist model of electoral turnout. The main argument of the model is voting is an act governed by institutional rules, laws and procedures and as such, the type of institutions in place is an important determinant of voter turnout rates. Jackman (1987) and Powell (1986) conducted cross-national studies on voter turnout and found that institutional differences like the electoral systems, registration process, voting age, the party system among others significantly affected the variations in turnout rates.

Jackman (1987: 412) points out the classic examples of the United States and Switzerland whose turnout rates are severely depressed by the institutional settings particularly the registration process, outweighing the favourable political attitudes of their populations. The study's findings were later replicated by many other studies like (Blais and Dobrynska, 1998; Norris, 2003; Endersby and Kriekhaus, 2008) who found institutional factors to significantly affect turnout rates. The institutionalist model lays emphasis on factors like the electoral system, party system, legal rules for registration, the level of the election and various other institutional variables that may affect the overall turnout. The preceding discussion has highlighted the major developments in electoral research which continue to influence literature in the field. The vast majority of the previous literature falls squarely into one or the other of these models with other studies using an overlapping approach combining one or two of these models.

### 2.3 Conceptualisation and operationalization of Voter Turnout

Voter turnout is a record of the electoral participation patterns and dynamics of the citizens in the elections. Voter turnout per se is a fairly simple and straightforward concept as it refers to

the act of citizens casting a vote. It is the measurement of voter turnout that has been a thorny issue in the literature and as such it is obviously an important issue that merits deeper exploration (Geys, 2006). The implications of voter turnout goes beyond its face value as a percentage of people who cast their votes in the elections. It reflects on, among other things, the openness and the inclusiveness of the political system, as well the quality of democratic institutions (Franklin, 2004). However, the precise definition and operationalization of the concept is far from a settled issue in the literature on electoral studies (Geys, 2006: 638).

**Table 3: shows the differences in the definition of voter turnout in 83 studies on electoral participation.**

<b>Definition</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Absolute number of votes cast	3
Number voted/voting age population	36
Number voted/number of eligible voters	13
Number voted/number registered	23
Number voted/size of electorate	2
No clear reference given	10

Source: Adapted from Geys, B. (2006). Explaining voter turnout: A review of aggregate-level research. Electoral studies, 25, pp. 637-663.

The way turnout is defined or measured is important because it determines the interpretation of electoral turnout rates and therefore any consideration of intervention from the relevant stakeholders. For example when as shown in Figure 2 in the last chapter when voter turnout in the last three South African local elections is measured as a percentage of the registered voters it averages above 50%. When measured against the voting age population the average drops to below 30%. Deciding on how to measure voter turnout therefore is a not a trivial affair as it can influence the outcome of the research and the conclusions that can be drawn on the quality of democracy (Herzenberg, 2011). As the information displayed on Table 3 above indicates, scholars of voter turnout have adopted different definitions of turnout and the bone of contention has been the choice of the denominator in measuring voter turnout (Ryan, 2006:8). About three studies of the 83 surveyed by Geys define turnout as the absolute number of votes cast. This measure simply refers to the number of people who cast their votes and is silent on any comparative measures thus making it less useful for scholars of turnout.

About 36 studies from the 83 studies examined, which is also the highest frequency, define voter turnout as the percentage of the voting age population. It divides the number of people who turned out to vote by the number of people in the country who are above the legal age of voting. For example it would be the number over the age of 18 in South Africa. Most studies (Squire et al, 1987; Nagel and McNulty, 1996; Powell, 1986; Jackman, 1987; Blais and Dobryznska, 1998) have used this measure. The argument here is that voter turnout and registration to vote are the same and therefore it would not be worthwhile measuring voter turnout against the number of registered voters (Powell, 1986; Squire et al 1987). The method has been praised as it takes into account those of a voting age who are eligible to vote but did not register to vote or simply failed to turnout. Scholars, however have expressed reservations on the accuracy of the method (Ryan, 2006; Kersting, 2009). Concerns have been raised about the VAP not being an accurate measure because it includes people of voting age who are not necessarily citizens of the particular country and therefore not eligible to vote (Ryan, 2006; McDonald and Popkin 2001).

Furthermore, 13 studies define voter turnout as a ratio of the voting eligible population (VEP) a method devised by McDonald and Popkin (2001). They argue that low voter turnout records in American elections are simply an artifact of the VAP and not an actual reality (*Ibid*, 2001:963). This method eliminates the influence of non-eligible citizens of voting age by estimating the percentage of the immigrants and subtracting it from the voting age population. However, lack of reliable data on the number of immigrants in many countries has seen this method being shunned by scholars in comparative studies of voter turnout (Geys, 2006). Another 23 studies defined voter turnout as the percentage of the registered voters (Chinsinga, 2006; Fauvelle-Aymar, 2008; Barwig, 2009; Bourbeau and Scruggs, 2007). However, this method has come under heavy criticism for inflating turnout as it eliminates the large number of eligible citizens who did not register to vote (Herzenberg, 2011). Quite tellingly, a total of 10 studies do not give a clear reference on how they define voter turnout.

The statistics shown on Table 3 indicate the extent to which the appropriate definition and measurement of voter turnout is a contested issue in electoral research. The most common definitions of voter turnout used in the literature are the ratio of the voting age population and the ratio of the registered voters. Indeed most studies use a combination of these two methods of operationalising voter turnout for conducting comparative studies on cross-national basis. In most instances the method of operationalization adopted by scholars is guided by the

availability of data in the context in question. For example the voting eligible population has much to recommend it as a method of calculating voter turnout but the non-availability of data concerning the number of non-eligible citizens makes it unreliable to use.

## 2.4 The electoral system: conceptualisation

The structure of the electoral system constitutes the independent variable of the present study hence the need to explore how it has been defined and used in the previous literature. An electoral system basically refers to the procedures or rules which guide the way voters cast their votes and how the number of votes a party amasses is then translated into seats in parliament (Blais and Massicotte, 1999: 40; IDEA, 2005: 5, Sartori, 2001: 99). There are no countries with identical electoral systems as the systems are usually tailored to suit the prevailing context and conditions. This perhaps explains why similar electoral systems may have varying degrees of influence or contrasting effects altogether, on voter turnout. However, specialists on electoral systems have come up with broad classifications of the different electoral systems whose application may differ from context to context but are informed by the same logic and share basic principles (Lipjhart, 1994).

The categories of the electoral systems found in the literature include the majoritarian system, plurality system, the proportional representation (PR) system and the mixed system (Blais and Aarts, 2000; Blais and Massicotte, 1999; Lindberg, 2005; Norris, 1997: 299; Farrell, 1997). It is important to note here that these are just broad classifications with numerous variants falling under each of these systems. This section of the literature review dwells on how the literature has defined and classified the diverse type of electoral systems. This is necessary for understanding or grasping their possible consequences on voting participation and the political system in general (Blais and Massicotte, 1999:42; Norris, 1997: 298). This also makes it easy to understand how exactly the mechanics of the mixed system used in the South African local elections might have an impact on voting participation.

### 2.4.1 The majoritarian system

This is also referred to as the first-past-the-post system and is one of the simplest electoral systems existing. The majoritarian systems can be classified into absolute and relative majority systems. Relative majority systems are also known as the plurality systems. Under this system, the candidate with the more votes than any other challenger wins the election (Bormann and Golder, 2013: 361; Lindberg, 2005; Norris, 1997: 299). It is used widely across the world, for example in Zimbabwe's legislative elections, in Britain and in the United States' congressional elections. Absolute majority systems on the other hand require



the winner of the election to have at least 50 percent plus one vote (Bormann and Golder, 2013: 361; Norris, 1997: 302). The plurality system can be used in the single-member district (SMD) and in the multi-member district (MMD) as well. The plurality system has some variants like the *limited vote*, *cumulative vote*, *the party block vote*, *block vote* and the *single non-transferrable vote* (SNTV) design to curb its bias towards major parties and to enhance minority representation (Blais and Massicotte, 1999: 43; IDEA, 2005:35). Variants such as the *alternative vote* (AV) and the *two-round system* (TRS) have been invented for the absolute majority system (Norris, 1997; Farrell, 1997).

The limited vote (LV) is candidate-centred and used usually in multi-member districts in which voters are able to cast more than one vote, but fewer votes than there are district seats. Under the SNTV, voters are required to cast their vote for a single candidate in a multimember district (Bormann and Golder, 2013: 361). The block vote (BV) is also a candidate-centred system used in multi-member districts in which voters cast a number of votes equal to the number of district seats. In each of these systems, the candidates who get the highest number of votes win. The party block vote (PBV) is used in multi-member districts in which voters cast a single party-centred vote; the party with the most votes wins all of the district seats. Norris (1997: 299) classifies these variants of the plurality system under a semi-proportional system since they are designed to achieve proportionality in representation.

#### 2.4.2 The Proportional Representation system

The PR system is one of most popular electoral systems in the world. PR can only be used multi-member districts where parties contest for several seats in an electoral district. There are two types of PR: the *list system* and the *single transferable vote* (STV) (Blais and Massicotte, 1999: 44). The party list can be open which case voters choose the candidate of their preference or they can be closed where voters are only able to endorse a party list without influencing the position of individual (Norris, 1997: 303). The closed list is used in South Africa's national elections and local elections. Moreover, party lists can be national, where the entire nation is a single electoral district or regional, with different regions being divided into electoral districts. The party list system uses quotas or divisors with remainders to allocate seats in parliament. A quota sometimes known as the electoral threshold is the minimum number of votes which parties have to get in order to secure at least one seat in parliament (Bormann and Golder, 2013: 363). The system uses five different quotas which include *Hare*, *Hagenbach-Bischoff*, *Imperiali*, *Reinforced imperiali* and *Droop* quotas

(Lipjhart, 1994; Farrell, 1997; Bormann and Golder, 2013; IDEA, 2005). Each of these quotas work in different ways that allow for the allocation of seats to the parties to be determined. Remainder seats<sup>17</sup> are decided using the largest remainder, highest average or the modified highest average system.

Blais and Massicotte (1999:45) argue that five major factors: district magnitude, electoral threshold, formula preferences for candidates and tiers play an important role in the choice of the PR list system and explain the variations of the system in different countries. The STV system does not use a party-list. It is a single-candidate preferential voting system where voters rank order the candidates. The candidates are required to obtain a particular quota in order to win a seat (Bormann and Golders, 2013: 365). As such, the PR system is chiefly designed to match the proportionality of the votes a party gets and its share of seats in parliament. It is also earmarked to improve the chances of smaller parties getting a seat in parliament and thus promoting inclusiveness (Blais and Massicotte, 1999; Norris, 1997; Weaver, 2002).

#### 2.4.3 The Mixed system

Mixed systems or intermediate systems as Weaver (2002: 114) refers to them are generally hybrids of different electoral systems used in one election and have been used as alternatives to purely majoritarian and PR systems. Weaver (2002) points out that those systems like the Alternative Vote (AV) and STV can be classified as mixed systems. Blais and Massicotte (1999:54) define a mixed system as a system where different electoral formulas are used simultaneously in a single election. Lindberg (2005:45) and Bormann and Golder (2013: 363) define it as an electoral system in which both voting procedures and seat allocation are in part proportional and in part majoritarian. Mixed systems can be independent or dependent.<sup>18</sup> The independent mixed systems are characterised by different methods of mixing PR and majoritarian systems which Blais and Massicotte (1999:54) identified as co-existence, superposition and fusion.

*Coexistence* is where some electoral districts use a PR system while others use a majoritarian formula. *Superposition* is one in which PR and majoritarian systems are applied in different

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<sup>17</sup> These are the seats that are left unallocated after the parties seats have been calculated from the number of votes they got. The parties are then ordered according to the size of the remainder of their votes and the party with the largest remainder gets the seat.

<sup>18</sup> According to Bormann and Golder (2013) refer to an independent mixed system as a mixed parallel system in which the majoritarian and proportional components of the electoral system are implemented independent of one another. A dependent system on the other hand is one in which the application of the proportional formula is dependent on the distribution of seats or votes produced by the majoritarian formula.

electoral tiers. It is used in countries like Russia, Japan, Ukraine, Guinea, Croatia and Mexico (Herron and Nishikawa, 2001: 66). A *fusion* occurs where majoritarian and proportional formulas are both used within a single electoral district (Bormann and Golder, 2013: 363). Dependent systems are distinguished into *correction and conditional* systems. The former describes a situation in which seats distributed by PR are used to correct distortions that emerge in the vote-seat share as a result of the majoritarian system. The *conditional* mixed system is one in which a particular effect of one formula necessitates the use of the other. That is, a particular result of the majoritarian formula makes it necessary to adopt the PR formula.

## 2.5 Electoral systems and voter turnout

That the electoral system design has an impact on the voting turnout rates in elections is a well-established fact in the literature on electoral participation (Powell, 1986; Jackman, 1987; Norris, 2003; Blais, 2006; Blais and Aarts, 2006; Barwig, 2009; Chen, 2011; Endersby and Kriekhaus, 2008; Rainey, 2014). The mechanics or the workings of the electoral systems have been found to have psychological effects on the parties' calculus of mobilization and the voters' calculus of participation (Blais and Massicotte, 1999: 56-59; Barwig, 2009: 290). General consensus within the literature suggests that PR systems are likely to enhance participation as compared to majoritarian systems (Norris, 2003; Rainey, 2014; Blais and Aarts, 2006). However, the jury is still out on the question of how exactly the different electoral systems influence the level of voting participation. Studies find that the impact of the electoral system differs in degree and sometimes in direction on voter turnout in different contexts (Blais and Aarts, 2006; Endersby and Kriekhaus, 2012). For example PR systems are found to be strongly related to higher turnout rates in Western Europe but this has not been replicated in the new democracies outside of Europe (Fornos et al, 2004; Perez-Linan, 2001).

In exploring the impact electoral systems have on electoral participation the literature has identified and emphasised on a number of crucial factors which play a key role in shaping voter turnout. These factors include among them, the district magnitude, electoral formula, electoral threshold, proportionality or disproportionality, the effective number of parties or the party system, and ballot structure (Blais and Aarts, 2006; Jackman, 1987; Norris, 2003; Endersby and Kriekhaus, 2012; Chen 2011). Some of the studies have focused on the

individual factors (Chen, 2011; Gallego et al, 2012) and some have focused on how these elements work together to influence turnout (Blais and Aarts, 2006; Norris, 2003).

The literature has examined varying hypotheses concerning these factors and their possible impact on the electoral participation dynamics. Moreover, these components also determine electoral costs, shape electoral choices and influence the decisiveness of the vote and thus exert significant influence on electoral turnout rates (Norris, 2003: 6). The following discussion will consist of an in-depth exploration, on a factor-by-factor basis, of how these components of the electoral system have been discussed in the literature in relation to their effects on the voters and parties attitudes towards the election. It will also focus on how the results or findings of the previous studies on the impact these factors have on voter turnout.

### 2.5.1 Turnout and district magnitude

District magnitude is one of the most important components of an electoral system and is a basic indicator used to distinguish between PR systems and the majoritarian/plurality systems. Indeed most scholars (Lijphart, 1994; Farrell, 2001; Jacobs and Spierings, 2010) assign it the decisive status in an electoral system. It has been one of the most consistent variables in the scholarship on the relationship between electoral turnout and electoral systems (Lipjhart, 1994; Blais and Aarts, 2006; Barwig, 2009; Norris, 2003; Jackman, 1987). District magnitude is defined as the number of seats up for grabs in an electoral district (Lipjhart, 1994: 10; Farrell, 2001: 6). For example, in this study the local municipalities constitute the electoral districts and their magnitude is measured by the number of wards each have. District magnitude differs with the electoral formula with single-member district (SMD) systems having the lowest magnitude of one while the PR systems have multi-member districts with the number of seats varying with districts. There seems to be a broader consensus in the extant literature that plays a significant role in shaping electoral turnout rates (Jacobs and Spierings, 2010; Perez-Linan, 2001).

Numerous explanations have been proffered in the existing literature regarding the effect of DM on electoral turnout rates. Blais and Aarts (2006:41) and Norris (2003) suggest that one of the principal reasons a high DM encourages high participation rates is the positive psychological effects it has on parties and voters alike. In a high DM even smaller parties have a chance of gaining a seat which motivates them to mobilize voters (Norris, 2003; Barwig, 2009). The presence of many parties on the other hand means that voters are likely to find a party that matches their preferences and are confident that their vote will not go to waste (Shugart, 2001; Chen, 2011). This results in the high propensity to participate in the

elections. However, after examining electoral participation trends the Indian and Israeli electoral systems, Zegfield (2013) concludes that district magnitude (high or low) has a negligible impact on the representation of smaller parties whose support is geographically concentrated. This may have a negative or no impact on the level of turnout as supporters of smaller parties are not sufficiently motivated to vote nor the parties themselves are motivated to mobilise voters. Jacobs and Spierings (2010: 705) argue that in the majority of the previous studies, country-level measurements of district magnitude are preferred to electoral level ones. As a result, they argue, the mean country value may conceal significant within-country variations. Hence, in this study we will examine voter turnout at the electoral district level and not at the country level.

A vast majority of studies confirm that district magnitude has a positive correlation with electoral participation (Blais and Aarts, 2006; Endersby and Kriekhaus, 2008; Powell, 1986; Jackman, 1987, Blais and Dobrynska, 1998). Other studies however (Perez-Linan, 2001; Fornos et al, 2004; Jacobs and Spierings, 2010; Barwig, 2009) have findings to the contrary with DM having a negative or no significant effect on electoral participation rates. In a study of 15 industrial democracies in the 1960s, Powell (1986) found that district magnitude increases turnout by more than 5 percentage points. These findings were replicated in a study of 17 democracies in the 1970s where the impact of district magnitude on electoral turnout was over 5 percentage points. Jackman (1987) conducted a comparative study of 19 established democracies on the impact of the electoral institutions on participation. His findings corroborated the conclusion reached by Powell as he found district magnitude to have between 9 and 10 percentage point incremental impact on voter turnout. The comparative studies of Jackson and Miller (1995) and Radcliff and Davis (2000) found district magnitudes to have a positive impact on electoral participation to have a correlation of between 8 and 15.

However, scholars focusing on new democracies in Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe have drawn conclusions to the contrary in their studies on the relationship between DM and the level of participation. For example, Perez-Linan (2001)'s study of 17 new Latin American democracies found that there was no significant correlation between district magnitude and electoral participation. Also focusing on Latin American countries as her case study, Fornos et al (2004) finds a negative relationship between district magnitude and electoral participation in most countries. In yet another study on the impact of district magnitude on turnout in Moroccan parliamentary elections Barwig (2009:298) also found

that participation tended to go down as magnitude increases with lower magnitudes recording a higher turnout.

Moreover, in a study of 405 presidential and parliamentary elections around the world Norris (2003) reports that political institutions do shape participation in important ways. She points out that a smaller district magnitude encourages higher participation. However, it is important to note that Norris defines the size of the electoral differently from other scholars as she divides the size of the population by the number of seats in an area (2003:5). Jacobs and Spierings (2010) study on 32 Dominican Republic districts finds that district magnitude has a negative impact on electoral participation but attribute this to the strong influence of clientelism in the smaller districts. Measuring the impact of DM on voter turnout in Taiwan elections Rainey (2014: 16-19) finds weak evidence of DM increasing citizens' closeness to a political party, their contact with a political party, their feeling of being represent and their turnout in the elections. Thus the findings in Europe are hardly generalizable elsewhere with evidence for the causality of the DM on turnout levels being weak or even negative.

### 2.5.2 Turnout and disproportionality

The turnout-disproportionality nexus has received extensive attention in electoral research over the years (Gallego et al, 2013; Milner, 2009; Norris, 2003; Blais and Aarts, 2006; Blais and Dobryznka, 1998; Selb, 2009; Eggers, 2014; Barwig, 2009). Milner (2009:2) contends that the proportionality of the electoral system is one of the foremost factors determining the citizens' propensity to turnout. Proportionality is generally conceptualised as the balance or the degree of correspondence between the number of votes a party gets and the number of seats it wins in parliament (Farrell, 2001; Lipjhart, 1994; Gallego et al, 2011). Disproportional electoral systems like the SMD are known to discourage voter turnout while more proportional systems like the PR are mostly associated with high degrees of participation. Blais and Aarts (2006: 188) argue that proportionality or disproportionality is also influenced by other features of the electoral system like the DM, electoral threshold and the number of parties. For example, if the DM is low or if the number of parties contesting the election is low then even PR system can produce disproportional results. What follows is an examination of the findings of the previous studies on the relationship between turnout and proportionality.

The verdict on the impact of proportionality on voter turnout in the existing studies has at best been 'noisy' with studies reporting mixed results. The majority of the studies focusing on the elections in industrial democracies find a positive relationship between turnout and

proportionality. Blais and Aarts (2006: 188) point out that most of the studies focusing on industrial democracies record a strong and negative correlation, between disproportionality and electoral turnout. In most of the studies turnout in disproportional systems is on average 10 points lower than in the most proportional ones. Milner (2009: 13) tested the correlation between proportionality and the informational cost for citizens to make an informed vote. He found that proportional systems reduced the cost of political knowledge and thus encourages participation in the elections. Jackman (1987) and Blais and Carty (1990) report negative and non-significant results in their examination of the relationship between disproportionality and voter turnout in the industrial democracies. Other comparative studies of industrial democracies (Crewe, 1981; Jackman and Miller (1995); Black, 1991; Franklin, 1996; Blais and Dobryzniska; 1998) find a negative correlation between disproportionality and voter turnout.

Moreover, in a study of 31 parliamentary elections in the European countries using district-level data, Selb (2009: 533-34) observes an above-average turnout trend in countries with proportional systems like Sweden and Denmark. Countries like the United Kingdom which use majoritarian systems record below average turnout rates. Eggers (2013) and Ladner and Milner (1999) focused on local elections and found a strong and significant relationship between proportionality and voter turnout in the French and Canadian local elections respectively. This confirms the long-standing notion that proportional systems do encourage a higher voter turnout. In his meta-analysis of 14 aggregate-level electoral studies, Geys (2006), finds that 70 percent of the 71 estimates succeeded in demonstrating the positive impact of proportionality on turnout. However, it is interesting that Blais and Dobryzniska (1998) whose study was the only one to have mixed old and new democracies report a minuscule impact of disproportionality on voter turnout. This may be due to the opposite effect of disproportionality on voter turnout in the new democracies.

Studies focusing on the new democracies in Latin America, Africa and Eastern Europe present an entirely different picture on the relationship between proportionality and electoral participation. In an examination of the Latin American democracies for example, Perez-Linan (2001) and Fornos et al (2004) report a non-significant relationship between disproportionality and voter turnout. Barwig (2009: 301-303) measured the correlation between deviation from proportionality and turnout in the Moroccan local elections and did not report any significant impact. Gallego et al (2012) use a learning model framework to explain the weaker disproportionality-turnout relationship in the new democracies. They

contend that the weaker relationship is due to the newness of the system and turnout improves in time as citizens and parties alike gain a full grasp on how the electoral system works. The findings concerning disproportionality or proportionality closely resemble those reported with the district magnitude. There is a positive correlation between these two variables and turnout in the industrial democracies while the trends in the new have been mostly negative. This suggests the need for research designs to be more sensitive to context in order to determine the true impact of these variables on electoral participation. The weakness of most of the previous studies, which this study hopes to rectify, is that they depend overwhelmingly on cross-national comparisons. By so-doing it is easy to overlook or miss important variations and contextual differences between the countries which may render the reported relationship between these variables spurious.

### 2.5.3 Turnout and party system

The influence of the party system on the electoral participation rates is one of the most interrogated areas in electoral research literature. There is overwhelming evidence from empirical studies to the effect that the party system is closely or perhaps inextricably linked with the electoral system (Duverger, 1954; Jackman, 1987; Jackman and Miller, 1995; Jacobs and Spierings, 2010). PR systems with a large district magnitude seem to result in the fragmentation of the party system since smaller parties have a chance of getting a few seats in parliament. Majoritarian systems on the other hand are characterised by a lot of safe seats and more often lead to the emergence of a two-party system (Norris, 2003). This is consistent with *Duverger's law* which states that the majoritarian system breeds a two-party system while the PR system is likely to foster a multi-party system (Duverger, 1954: 239). This observation is also supported by (Farrell, 2001; Lijphart, 1994; Powell 1982; Barwig, 2009). The party system structures the competition between the parties and influences their mobilisation efforts. It also structures choices at the voters' disposal and therefore is likely to be a factor in their calculus of mobilisation (Barwig, 2009). Thus a PR system gives more parties, especially smaller parties with a dispersed following a chance to get a seat in parliament. This results in an increase the pool of voters who are able to find a party matching their preferences. However it is important to highlight this caveat:

Proportional representation (or larger districts) could foster turnout because it produces more parties, thus providing voters with more choice and more mobilization. On that account, there should be a positive association between the number of parties and turnout. As suggested by Jackman, however, multiparty systems usually produce coalition governments, which make



elections less decisive. Most studies report a negative relationship, with the significant exceptions being those dealing with Latin American countries (Blais and Aarts, 2006: 190).

Furthermore, Selb and Grofman (2011: 528) argue that in a two-party system parties tend to converge ideologically thus offering the voters a limited choice and hence stifling turnout. On the other hand multipartyism encourages ideological heterogeneity. This then broadens the choices at the voters' disposal thus potentially increasing turnout. The majority of the studies however, have reported a negative relationship between the number of parties and voter turnout (Jackman, 1987; Blais and Carty, 1990; Blais and Dobryznska, 1998; Jackman and Miller, 1995; Kostadinova, 2004). Other studies report that the number of parties' impact on turnout is not negative but insignificant nonetheless (Fornos et al, 2004; Perez-Linan, 2001; Black, 1991; Barwig, 2009).

Jackman (1987) suggests that the propensity of a multiparty system to produce a coalition government reduces the decisiveness of the vote and thus depresses turnout. Grofman and Selb (2011) in their examination on the relationship between the number of parties in Spain and New Zealand suggest that the relationship is curvilinear with turnout dropping beyond a certain number of parties. Barone and de Blasio (2011) argue that two-party systems are likely to boost electoral participation. This is because since the contest is between two candidates with a realistic chance of winning, voters may feel that they have an effective right of choice and their vote will be decisive. Blais and Aarts (2006:189) also argue that the most direct consequence of a PR system is to allow for more parties. However, having more parties does not increase turnout, it might depress it. An alternative explanation is that turnout is depressed in single-member districts by the presence of many safe seats.

## 2.6 Local and African literature

The contention at the centre of this study is that the electoral system is an important factor influencing the overall voter turnout levels in the South African local elections. The structure of the electoral system shapes the incentives for voters to participate in the elections and for the parties to mobilise their voters (Barwig, 2009). This begs the question: to what extent do the observations made in the established democracies hold true in the South African context? Lindberg (2005: 42) argues that contrary to the predictions of the established literature, electoral systems actually have the same effects in African politics as in established democracies. Local literature addressing this question in the local context has been at best dispersed and far-between. This section examines the findings of the few previous studies

that have addressed this in South Africa and Africa (Barwig, 2009; Kersting, 2006; Chinsinga, 2006; Kuenzi and Lambright, 2005). Literature on other African countries may be relevant to the South African context since they share fundamental similarities in terms of the newness of their democratic systems as well as other social, cultural, historical and political factors (Kuenzi and Lambright, 2007; Young, 2003).

Kersting (2006) investigated the effect of institutional mechanisms like the electoral rules, women quotas and the timing of elections on voter turnout in Southern African countries. On the impact of the electoral system the study got mixed results, with Namibia which employs a PR system for its elections recording high turnout rates. South Africa on the other hand which also uses a PR system records a lower turnout. In the countries using the majoritarian system Tanzania and Malawi have a high turnout while Zimbabwe has a low turnout rate (Kersting, 2006:144). In an examination of the turnout dynamics in Malawi's local elections Chinsinga (2006: 20-21) argues that the pluralitarian electoral system makes elections a matter of life and death where the winner takes all. This makes it difficult for voters to believe that in politics there are no permanent losers or winners and hence the supporters of smaller parties are less motivated to vote.

Moreover, Fauvelle-Aymar (2006)'s study of electoral turnout in Johannesburg's 2006 local elections such factors as election closeness and the number of candidates were found to significantly affect the turnout levels. Furthermore Lindberg (2005: 58) finds that just like in the established democracies, PR and mixed systems closely correlate with higher voter turnout rates while the majoritarian systems are associated with lower turnout rates. Mattes and Southall (2003)' survey of public attitudes towards the electoral system in South Africa revealed that positive attitudes towards the system in terms of accountability, fairness, transparency and effectiveness were closely correlated with a high propensity to participate. In the results of the survey 72% of the people said they believed the system was fair, 81% agreed the system was inclusive while 78% believed the electoral system gave the voters a chance to change a party in government (*Ibid*, 2003: 54). Kuenzi and Lambright (2007) carried out a cross-national study on the factors that affect voter turnout in Sub-Saharan African multi-party regimes. The study found that countries using PR system had a significantly higher turnout with an average of 71% than countries employing the majoritarian system which had an average of 59% (*Ibid*, 2007: 679).

Furthermore, studies have been done on the impact of the electoral system on women's representation in South Africa but not necessarily on voter turnout (Ballington, 1998; Bratton, 2002; Ballington, 2004; Nkiwane, 2007). Although these do not investigate the relationship between the electoral system and electoral participation, the findings of these studies can be useful for this research question nonetheless. This is because these studies hint on the representativeness of the electoral system is a quality that significantly shapes the voters' propensity to turnout (Kersting, 2006: 137).

Any electoral system refers to the set of institutional arrangements for the purpose of conducting an election. This includes laws, regulations, and administrative procedures enveloping the electoral process. Representation, being the local outcome of most electoral processes, can be critically determined by a particular electoral system. This ultimately, as political scientist Harold Lasswell argued, is about, "who gets what, when, and how (Nkiwane, 2007: 3).

Morna et al (2010) point out that the use of the party list system is biased against women. This is because women candidates are mostly concentrated on the lower slots of the lists and therefore stand a little chance of making it to parliament. This obvious bias against women may affect women voters' chances of turning out and women candidates' motivation to mobilise and thus reduce voter turnout. Britton (2002: 44) suggests that such factors of the electoral system as disproportionality, ballot structure and district magnitude affect the chances women have of making it to parliament.

## 2.7 A Critique

One striking feature of the vast majority of the literature just examined is that it is predominantly cross-national (Blais and Dobrynska, 1998; Jackman, 1986; Blais, 2000; Powell, 1986; Endersby and Kriekhaus, 2008). Most scholars opt for the "high street of political science" to borrow the words of Ladner and Milner (1999: 237). Only a handful of studies have examined the relationship between electoral participation and electoral rules from a within country or local perspective (Barwig, 2009; Ladner and Milner, 1999; Flauvelle-Aymar, 2006; Chinsinga, 2006; Hajnal and Lewis, 2003; Abrial et al; 2003). While the cross-national approach has much to recommend it as a step towards a comprehensive comparative perspective, it is nonetheless fraught with methodological difficulties. Rainey (2014) and Franklin (2004) contend that one of the setbacks is that countries have wildly varying circumstances. Making causal inferences using cross-national comparisons is problematic because it is impossible to control for all differences between PR and

majoritarian countries. As such, the correlation between the variables being investigated risks being spurious. Ladner and Milner (1999) argue that the limited number of countries makes the cross-national approach ill-suited to research requiring sophisticated statistical analysis.

Secondly and perhaps most importantly, the vast majority of the literature investigates the effects of electoral systems using national elections as the units of analysis. Second order or subnational elections like the local elections are largely neglected in the established literature (Ladner and Milner (1999). Only a few studies have taken the subnational or local elections as their units of analysis (Ladner and Milner, 1999; Hajnal and Lewis, 2003; Barone and de Blasio, 2011; Barwig, 2009; Flauvel-Aymar, 2006). This is the gap that the present study intends to address as it investigates the impact of the electoral rules on electoral participation patterns in the local elections of KZN.

The study contends that the understanding of the relationship between electoral rules and electoral participation will remain incomplete without understanding how these variables relate in the local elections. Studying subnational systems comes with a plethora of advantages. Firstly, Ladner and Milner (1999) argue that it is possible to isolate the impact of the explanatory variable since such an approach conforms to the similar systems research design. Secondly, municipalities have the advantage of being far larger in number than provinces in the case of South Africa. KZN alone has fifty local municipalities as compared to just ten provinces which would be the units of analysis if the study focused on the national elections. This large number of municipalities not only makes it possible to control for socio-cultural factors, but also works well with various statistical analysis. This study does not in any way pretend that the relationship between electoral systems and electoral turnout is a new find. It however intends to make a modest contribution to the already formidable body of knowledge on the subject matter. It particularly aims at shedding more light on how these variables work in an African and subnational context; areas which have, by and large, been neglected in the established literature.

## 2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the extensive scholarship that has been produced with regards to explaining the dynamics between electoral rules and electoral participation. The findings of the literature vary both across space and time. In the literature the results of the relationship between electoral systems and voter turnout seem to differ by region. Most of the studies find

that the results obtained from the industrial and established democracies in Western Europe and North America do not hold in the new democracies in Africa, Latin America, Asia and the post-communist states in Eastern Europe. The majority of the studies in the literature seem to prefer the “high street of political science” focusing mainly cross-national studies of electoral participation and more often than not on the national elections. As such the electoral participation dynamics in the local elections has largely been ignored. The present study contends that local elections can teach us a lot about the influence of electoral rules on electoral participation. Indeed the debate on how these two variables relate would be incomplete without the knowledge of how they operate in local elections.



## CHAPTER THREE

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE AND THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM FOR THE LOCAL ELECTIONS

#### 3.1 Introductory remarks

Electoral systems, like any other institutional paraphernalia necessary for a well-functioning democratic political system are embedded in a country's wider political, historical and social spectrum. The operations and the effects of electoral systems or rules cannot be fully understood without an intimate knowledge of the environment within which they are operationalised. The design of electoral system structures is one in a long list of important political choices new democracies have to make in order to survive. It is informed or underpinned by a particular set of a society's history, values and political and social characteristics. The values may differ ranging from accountability, transparency, stability, participation and representation among others. Not all values apply in equal measure in all countries or settings, different countries emphasise or prioritise different values or factors in crafting their electoral rules. South Africa is no exception. The electoral system used for its local elections has been designed to complement and facilitate the transition from an undemocratic and unrepresentative to a democratic government system (a delicate process by any imagination). It is sensitive to and in tandem with, the country's history and values, foremost among which include representation, political stability and participation (Mattes, 2004: 52).

With this in mind, this chapter will give an in-depth descriptive background of the structure of local government in South Africa and attempt to paint a clear picture of the context within which the electoral system operates. The overriding objective of this chapter is to argue and demonstrate that contrary to popular impressions, local elections do not occupy the fringes or margins of South Africa's democratic system but are one of the pillars (if indeed not the pillar) of the democratic system. Since local elections are conducted to elect the local government, it is to be expected that the governmental system (actual or intended) and the electoral system will complement each other. Moreover, this chapter will also discuss in detail, the procedures and mechanics of the electoral system in the local elections. That includes how votes are translated into seats in the local councils and how the local municipalities are delimited and divided into electoral districts. This will aid effective understanding of how the electoral rules may affect the voters' decision on whether or not to

participate in the elections and the parties' motivation to mobilise voters thus determining the level of turnout. Finally it will describe how the system functions in the KZN context with a view to understanding how it shapes electoral participation.

### 3.2 The Local government in South Africa: A brief background

Following the demise of apartheid in the early 1990s and the eventual establishment of a democratic dispensation in 1994, South Africa faced the challenge of consolidating the new democratic culture (AfriMAP, 2006: 5). To achieve this, the country embarked on a broad-based, multi-level (national, provincial cascading down to the local level), democratisation process. While democracy at the national and provincial levels is important, the extent of its sustainability and strength depends on democratisation at the local level. The overall success of the democratisation crusade was going to depend, by and large, on strong democratic institutions at the local level which serve as a foundation for the national democratic revolution (Cashad, 2000). This entailed changing the structure of the local government to make it more accessible, representative and equitable. The choice of the electoral system was central in achieving these objectives. The electoral system can be an effective instrument of bridging the past and the present in post-conflict societies like South Africa.

The local government in South Africa is one among the many spheres of South African politics that had to be rehabilitated from the scourge of decades of apartheid. Racial segregation, unequal service provision and undemocratic elections from which the majority of the citizens were excluded, characterised local government in the apartheid era (White Paper on Local Government, 1998: 12). Moreover, local governments under apartheid served at the behest of the provincial governments and thus their powers were severely limited. Their structures, procedures and responsibilities were defined and determined, to varying degrees and in varying ways, by the respective provincial governments (SALGA, 2014). This rendered the local municipality system ineffective as the local governments were stripped of all their independence and institutional integrity and could only exercise their powers at the mercy of the provincial authorities.

However, the tide shifted when the democratisation wave swept through which also saw the unbanning and eventual legalisation of the liberation movements in 1990.<sup>19</sup> These events set in motion the transformation process of the country's local municipality system which sought

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<sup>19</sup> The African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) and other political parties which were against the apartheid government were banned by the apartheid government and their leaders exiled in the 1980s. As such they could not operate or contest elections in the country.



to reverse and undo the legacy of apartheid. This process was informed and underpinned by the need to entrench democratic practices of equality, transparency, accountability and non-discrimination within the operations and structures of the local municipalities. The transformation process occurred in three stages:

- *The first, pre-interim phase* commenced with the coming into operation of the Local Government Transition Act 209 of 1993 (LGTA) and the establishment of the negotiating forums in local authorities pending the first local government election.
- *The second phase* began when the first local government elections were held in 1995/1996, establishing integrated municipalities although these were not yet fully democratically elected.

*The third and final phase* began with the local government election in December 2000, establishing the current municipalities. Underpinning the transition process were the interim Constitution of 1993 and the final Constitution of 1996 (South African Local Government Association, 2014).

### 3.3 The functions and structure of the local government

The current structure and design as well as the duties of the local government is embedded in and comprehensively defined in Chapter 7 of the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. In a bid to make the local municipalities more effective and accountable in discharging their duties the constitution granted the local government institutional independence and autonomy from the upper tiers of government. Thus the local government, under the new constitution was granted the status of a sphere of government with effective powers (The White Paper on Local Government, 1998: 13). This meant that local governments could now introduce policies and pass by-laws to govern their local communities without the intervention or the supervision of the provincial or national government. The constitution lays out the various functions municipalities are expected to fulfil:

- to provide democratic and accountable government for local communities;
- to ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner;
- to promote social and economic development;
- to promote a safe and healthy environment; and
- to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government. (South African Constitution, 1996: 47).

Besides clarifying the duties expected of local municipalities the constitution also defines the status of municipalities with regards to their legal status and in relations to other spheres of government.

(1) The local sphere of government consists of municipalities, which must be established for the whole of the territory of the Republic.

(2) The executive and legislative authority of a municipality is vested in its Municipal Council.

(3) A municipality has the right to govern, on its own initiative, the local government affairs of its community, subject to national and provincial legislation, as provided for in the Constitution.

(4) The national or a provincial government may not compromise or impede a municipality's ability or right to exercise its powers or perform its functions. (South African Constitution, 1996: 151-152).

With such importance attached to the local municipalities in terms of their influence on the direction of public policy, the importance of citizens participating in the elections cannot be over-emphasized. The election outcome, which is determined to an important extent by the level of voter turn-out determines what policies will be pursued and who stands to benefit from those policies (Havenga, 2002: 58).

The Constitution also lays out the structure of the local government institutions. This involves the single tier category (A) municipalities which includes municipalities with exclusive executive and legislative authority over its area. Category (B) is a municipality that shares its executive and legislative powers in its area with a category C municipality within whose area it falls. Lastly, category C is a municipality that has municipal and executive authority in an area that includes more than one municipality (Nyalunga, 2006: 4). This came after the government's adoption of the 1998 White Paper on Local government which developed a framework for the transformation of the local government system. The paper laid out plans to rehabilitate and refocus the local municipalities to play a developmental role and become the catalyst of social and economic development.

South Africa has 228 local municipalities country wide which are clustered into 44 district municipalities. District municipalities consist of 6 or seven geographically contiguous, local municipalities and oversee the functioning of the individual local municipalities as defined by the Municipal Structures Act (SALGA, 2014; Nyalunga, 2006). There are also 8 metropolitan municipalities which are established in the largest urbanised and industrialised centres across

the country. The metropolitan municipalities include Johannesburg, Tshwane, Mangaung, Ekurhuleni, Nelson Mandela Bay, Cape Town, Buffalo City and eThekweni which is the only metropolitan in the study area of KZN. The metropolitan areas share the same legal and constitutional functions with the local municipalities of transforming local government in the country (The White Paper on Local Government, 1998: 14).

Although it's more than a decade since the transformation process of the municipality system took off in South Africa, the legacy of discrimination and inequality stubbornly lingers on. Poverty and poor service delivery still persist in some of the poorest communities while the case is different for the more affluent and well-to-do communities (Nyalunga, 2006: 5). Municipalities still face enormous challenges in creating the kind of communities envisioned in Chapter 7 of the 1996 constitution. It is in the municipalities where the impact of policies and disparities in wealth are most acutely felt. This makes local elections all the more important as the citizens are granted the opportunity to elect people that they think will serve them best.

### 3.4 Electoral rules for local elections in South Africa

The importance of the choice of electoral rules in a democratizing, diverse and historically divided countries like South Africa and most countries in Africa cannot be overemphasized (Mozaffar and Vengroff, 2002: 603; Lindberg, 2005: 43). It is even more important for the local elections considering that local municipalities, whose composition and policy direction is determined by election outcome, exercise effective powers and are at the forefront of social and economic development (COGTA, 2009: 2). The choice of electoral systems to govern the electoral process is purely circumstantial, which explains why different countries employ different electoral rules. It is more often informed by the political, social, cultural and sometimes even physical circumstances a country faces, normative and empirical concerns (Norris, 1997: 299). For example, the need to redress the imbalances created apartheid and the racial and ethnic diversity were some of the factors which weighed in significantly in the decision to adopt a mixed electoral system for the local elections in South Africa.

As shown in chapter 2 of this study, electoral systems are diverse and include in their fold the PR system, the single-member constituency majoritarian/pluralitarian system and the mixed system. For the local elections which are the focus of the present study, South Africa uses an

*independent*<sup>20</sup> mixed system which is a hybrid of PR and the SMD plurality formulas (de Visser et al, 2000;). Blais and Massicotte (1999: 54-56) came up with a typology of mixed systems classifying them into coexistence, superposition, conditional and correctional based on how the electoral formula is applied. For example the application of the PR rules does not depend on the outcome of the single-member constituency systems. South Africa has had four local elections since the inception of democratic elections in 1994; in 1995, then 2000, 2006 and 2011. However the current electoral system was first applied in the 2000 elections and continued to be applied in the latter elections (IEC, 2014).

The mixed system is used in all local elections in the country without exception as this is prescribed in the constitution. Since the different provinces are unable to choose their own electoral systems the potential findings of the impact of the electoral rules on electoral participation in KZN can in some ways be generalized to the wider South African context. The choice of the mixed system was guided by the need to balance representation and inclusiveness with accountability and fairness as emphasised in the constitution (Fakir, 2014). The majoritarian element of the electoral system promotes accountability as the council representatives are forced to answer directly to their constituencies and not the party. The PR system on the other hand, promotes inclusiveness as parties are allocated seats based on the percentage of their vote share. This, it is argued, promotes even smaller parties which tend to have scattered support barely enough to see them through in the single-member constituency elections (Blais and Aarts, 2006; Norris, 2003; Sibalukhulu, 2012).

### 3.5 Local and Metropolitan councils

South Africa holds elections every five years in 228 local municipalities, 8 metropolitan municipalities and 44 district municipalities. The electorate elects representatives for the metropolitan, local and the district councils (Nyalunga, 2006: 5). Half the seats in the metropolitan and local councils are drawn from the PR system and the other half from the single-member ward system. Local councils are elected in local municipalities which are divided into a number of wards demarcated by the municipal demarcation board depending on its size in terms of geography and population (Municipal Demarcation Board (MDB), 2014).

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<sup>20</sup> Golder (2005: 112) defines independent mixed systems as those in which two electoral formulas are implemented or applied independently of each other. That is, unlike in Germany's national elections which also uses a mixed system, the outcome of one formula does not affect the application of the other.

Voters are given two ballots; one for the ward representatives and one for the party list representatives. The constituency-based system is based on plurality whereby the candidate with the highest number of votes wins the seat even if they do not secure the absolute majority. The PR component uses a closed-list system where the voters are only asked to endorse a party list of their choice without altering it (Louw, 2014). The constituency-based system and the PR system both generate the number of seats equal to the number of wards in a local or metropolitan municipality.

### 3.6 District councils

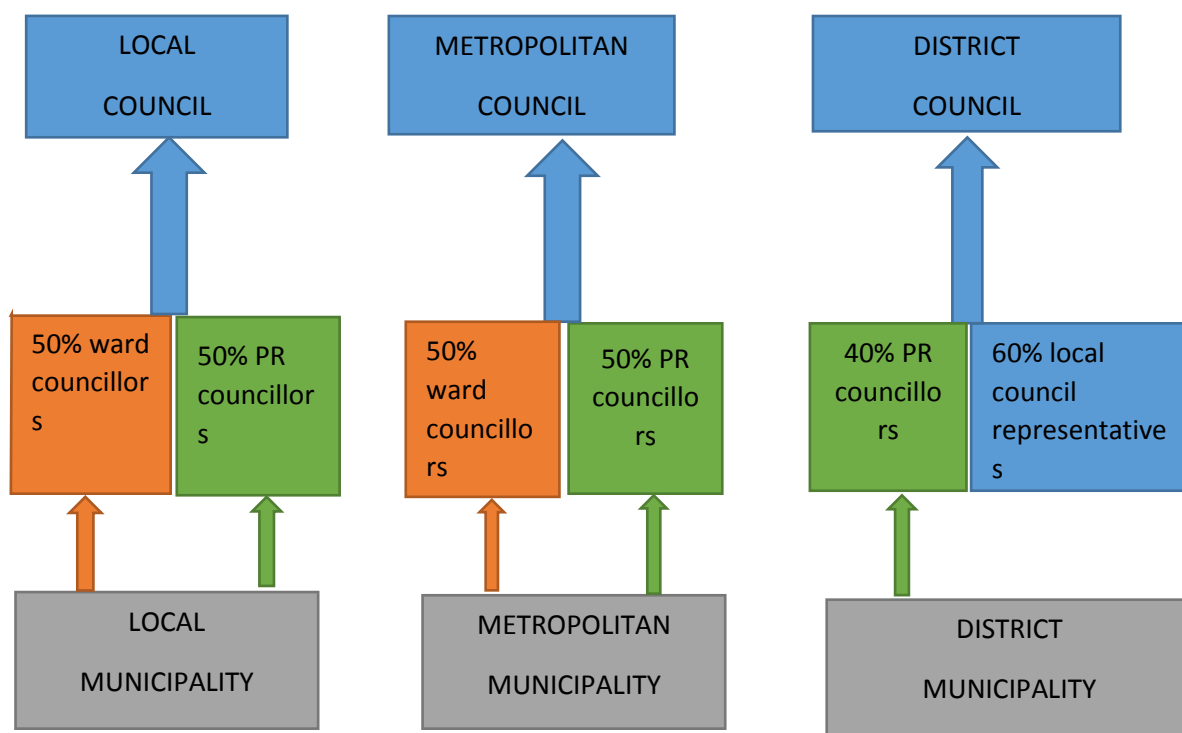
The voters also vote for a district council using a mixed system but in a slightly different way from that used in the local and metropolitan councils. District municipalities consist of several local municipalities whose common affairs are managed by a district council (IEC, 2014; Louw, 2014). Every voter in a local municipality will also vote for the district council that their local area is part of. The district council ballot has party names from which the voters make their choice and the seats are allocated according to the percentages parties get in the entire district municipality (IEC, 2014). The PR system generates only 40% of the seats in the district council. The other 60% of the seats will be filled by the local councils in the district municipality. Each council is allocated a specific number of seats and is required to forward the candidates who will take the seats based on the support each party got in the local municipality (IEC, 2014). For example if the Democratic Alliance (DA) gained 50% of the seats in a local council which is given 6 seats in the district council, it will send 3 of its candidates.

### 3.7 The process of translating votes into seats for the parties

The way votes are counted and translated into seats for the parties in the legislature is perhaps the most important part of an electoral process. It is indeed the defining feature and the basis on which electoral systems are classified (Norris, 2003: 4; Farrell, 2001: 4). Norris (1997:299) refers to it as “the heart of the electoral system”. The South African local elections employ different counting methods for PR and SMD systems. The translation of votes into seats is the same for the metropolitan and local councils under both. However, whereas the same principles of balancing proportionality and accountability also underpin the allocation of seats in the district municipalities, there are technical differences in the counting of votes and allocation of seats (African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes, 2006). For the single-member constituency system the electoral formula is fairly straightforward. The candidate with the highest number of votes in the ward will win the seat.

For the PR system the allocation of seats is determined by a quota system (Louw, 2014). Figure 3 below gives an insight on the allocation of seats for the local, metropolitan and district councils.

**Figure 4: Graphical illustration of the electoral system**



The quota is a specific minimum number of votes that a party must have in order to get at least one seat in the council. It is calculated by dividing the number of valid votes cast in a in the local, district or metropolitan municipality by the number of seats available in that particular municipality (Louw, 2014). Parties are then allocated seats in the council by dividing the number of votes they got by the quota number. When all the seats have been allocated by the quota system the remaining seats will be allocated by the largest remainder method (IEC, 2014). This means that the party with the largest remainder of votes will get first of the remaining seats and this is done until all the seats have been allocated.

**Table 4: Vote-seat translation for the ward-based component of the system**

Party A candidate	6 500 votes
Party B candidate	7 464 votes
Party C candidate	1 279 votes
Independent candidate	4 600 votes

Party B candidate in the table illustration above will win the ward seat by virtue of having the highest number of votes. It does not have to be the absolute majority as any proportion of the total is enough to win one a seat as long as it is the largest proportion in the pool of contesting candidates.

### 3.8 Seat allocation using the PR system: An in-depth look

#### *Step 1: Determining the quota*

The quota refers to the minimum number of votes a party will need to gain representation in the local council through the PR system. It is effectively the threshold of representation (See Gallagher, 1992: 483-487). Working out the quota is a fairly straightforward procedure. It is calculated by dividing the total number of votes cast in a local municipality by the difference between the total number of wards and the number of wards won by independent candidates under the ward-based system. The wards won by independent candidates are not available for allocation to the parties under the PR system (IEC, 2014).

$$\text{QUOTA} = \frac{\mathbf{X}}{\mathbf{Y} - \mathbf{Z}} + 1$$

**X** represents the total number of valid votes cast in the local municipality for both the PR elections and in the ward-based elections.

**Y** is the number of seats in the local council

**Z** represents the number of seats independent candidates won in the ward-based elections in that local municipality.

#### *Hypothetical example of quota calculation:*

For example, say a local municipality (**B**) had a total record **500 000** valid votes for both PR and single-member ballots combined, with **50** council seats, **25** to be filled by PR and **25** by ward-based elections. **10** ward elections were won by independent candidates who garnered a total of **70 000** votes and the other **15** ward seats were won by candidates belonging to parties. The quota would be calculated thus:

$$\text{Quota} = \frac{500\,000 - 70\,000}{50 - 10} + 1 = 10\,751$$

As shown in the example above, for a party to win at least one seat in the council under the PR seat allocation system it must have garnered at least 10 751 votes.

*Step 2: allocating seats to the contesting parties*

After determining the quota, the next step is to allocate seats to the parties depending on the number of votes they managed to get in the elections (IEC, 2014). Following the above example for calculating the quota, determining the number of seats each party gets is a fairly simple and straightforward procedure. Say four parties **A, B, C** and **D** contested the elections, following example from step 1 above, they would be left to compete for the remaining 40 seats in the local council and **430 000** votes since **10** seats were won by independent contestants. Seat allocation is calculated thus:

$$\text{Number of seats} = \frac{\text{Total number of valid votes a party gets}}{\text{Quota}}$$

Say the number of votes are distributed as follows:

$$\text{Party A - 200 000} = \frac{200\,000}{10\,751} = 18 \text{ seats remainder } 6\,482$$

$$\text{Party B - 100 000} = \frac{100\,000}{10\,751} = 9 \text{ seats remainder } 3241$$

$$\text{Party C - 85 000} = \frac{85\,000}{10\,751} = 7 \text{ seats remainder } 9743$$

$$\text{Party D - 45 000} = \frac{45\,000}{10\,751} = 4 \text{ seats remainder } 1996$$

The total number of seats distributed amongst the parties by the quota system is 38 out of a total of 40 seats. The two remaining seats will be allocated using the largest remainder method in which the seats are given to the parties with the largest remainders votes after the first allocation.

**Table 5: Shows how the remainders are used to allocate seats which have not been allocated in the first allocation**

Party	Remainder	Ranking	Second allocation	Final allocation



A	6 482	2	1	18 +1= 19 + ward seats
B	3 241	3		3 + ward seats
C	9 743	1	1	7 + 1= 8 + ward seats
D	1 996	4		4 + ward seats

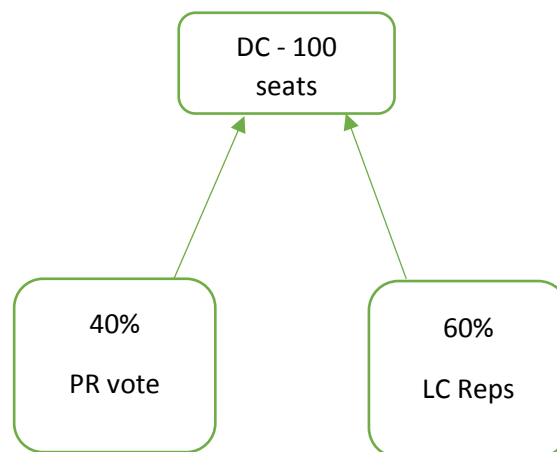
As shown in Table 6 above parties A and C have the largest remainders from the first allocation and are therefore allocated the remaining seats. Party C with the largest remainder gets the first seat and party A with the second largest remainder gets the second seat.

### 3.9 Allocation of seats in the district council

A hypothetical example of how seats are allocated in the district council:

For a district with 100 seats and five local councils, 40 seats will be allocated through a PR vote by the public in the elections. 60 of the seats will be derived from the five local councils that fall under that particular district council. Each local council will be allocated amount of seats proportional to its percentage share of voters in the district municipality (Nyalunga, 2006). Parties send representatives from each local council according to their seat share percentage.

**Figure 5: Graphical illustration of seat allocation in the district councils in local elections**

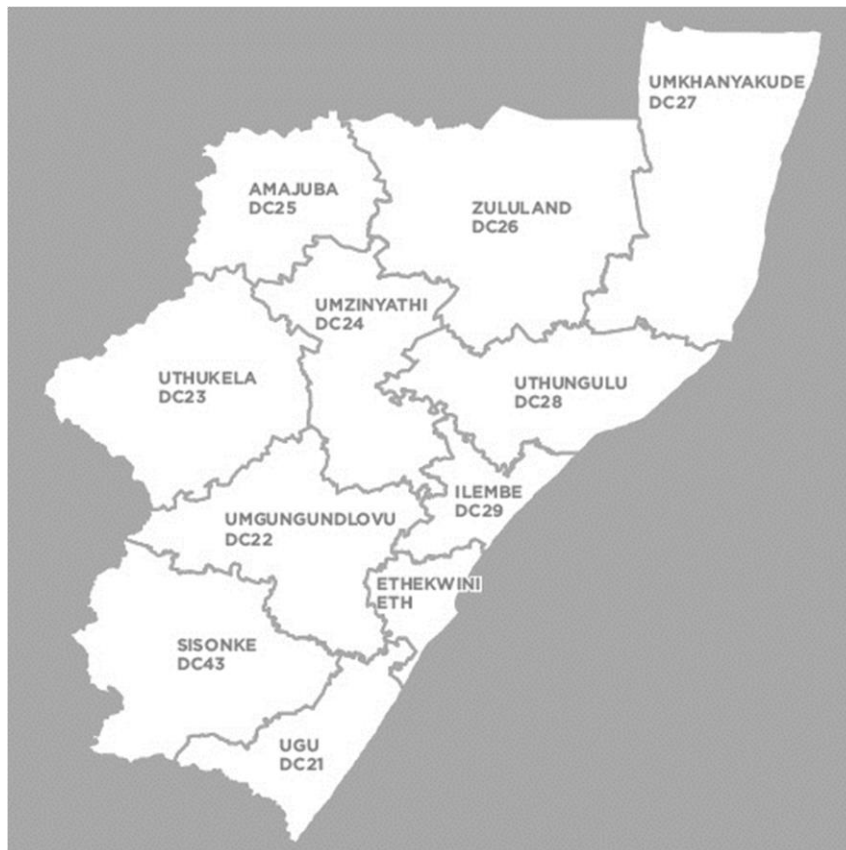


### 3.10 The Case Study: KwaZulu Natal Province

KwaZulu Natal (KZN) is one of South Africa's nine provinces located in the south-east of Africa's southernmost country. The province is one of the smallest in terms of geographical size covering 94 361 square kilometres. Its high population of over 10 million people makes it one of the most populous provinces in the country (The Local Government Handbook,

2012). KZN is divided into 10 district municipalities and has one metropolitan municipality: eThekweni. The district municipalities are further divided into 49 local municipalities, each consisting of between 3 and 7 local municipalities which also mark the electoral districts (The Local Government Handbook, 2012). Pietermaritzburg is the capital of the province while Durban is the largest city. Other major towns and cities include Newcastle, Richards Bay, Port Shepstone, Richmond, Estcourt and Ladysmith.

**Figure 5: Map showing district municipality boundaries of KZN**



Source: The Local Government Handbook. (2013).

### 3.11 Socio-economic background of KZN: Important statistics

The electoral process is not isolated and does not take place in a vacuum. It is rather embedded in a wider environment of which socio-economic make-up is a core element. Knowledge of a country or polity's socio-economic characteristics is essentially in order to firmly grasp the influence of the electoral system on the electorate. Hence this section takes a look at the main elements of KZN's socio-economic background like population structure in terms of racial and age distribution, education level and the unemployment rate. Geys (2006) in a comprehensive meta-analysis of extant aggregate level research argued that socio-

economic factors like population size and education level are essential for a general model of turnout. Figure 6 shows the distribution of population by race across the province's district municipalities.

**Figure 7: Population distribution by race in district municipalities 1996, 2001, 2011**

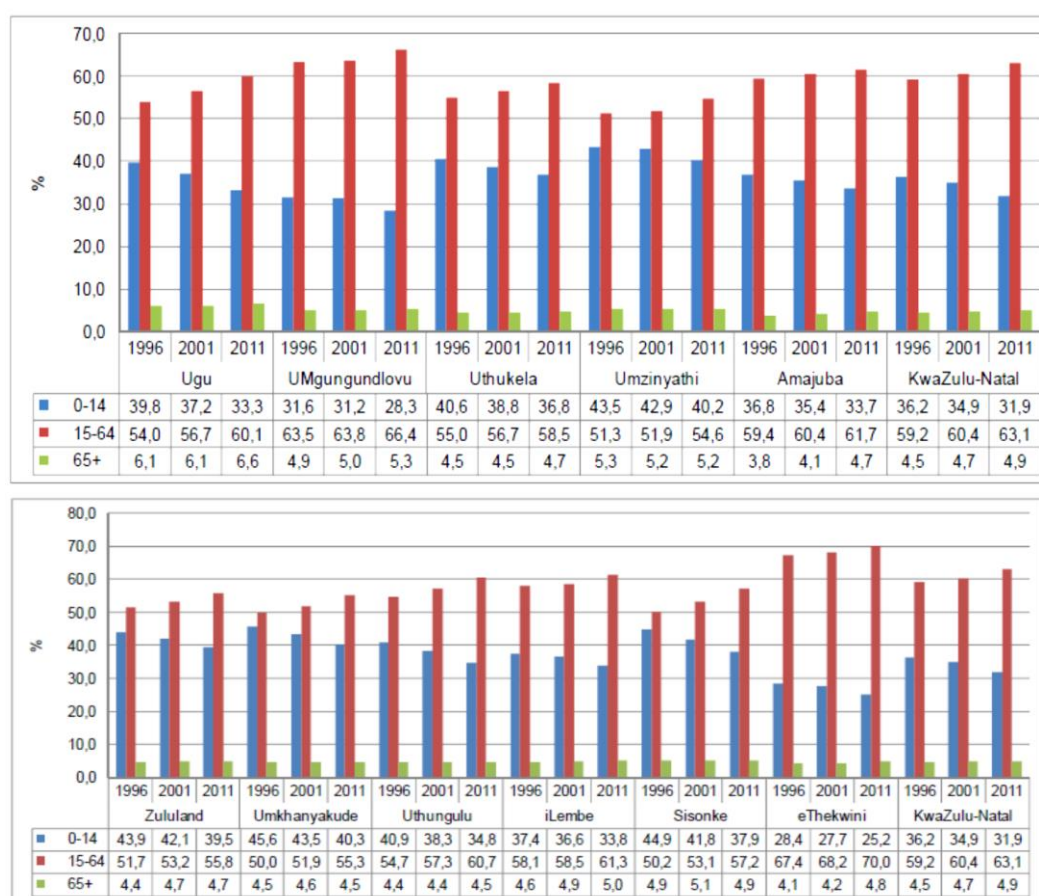


Source: Statistics South Africa (2011: 24).

Black South Africans are by far the dominant racial grouping across all the district municipalities. EThekweni, the sole metro municipality in the province is the most racially diverse with the largest number of Indians, whites and coloureds with black people constituting a comparatively lower proportion of the population. UMgungundlovu also has a fairly racially diverse population. The rest of the district municipalities are dominated by black population with insignificant numbers of residents of other races.

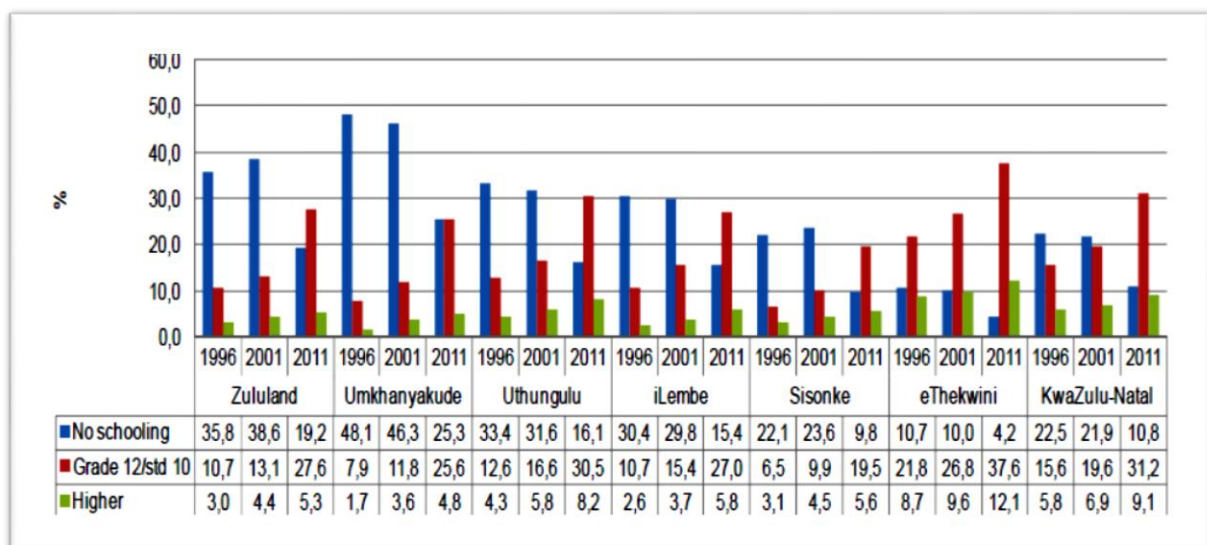
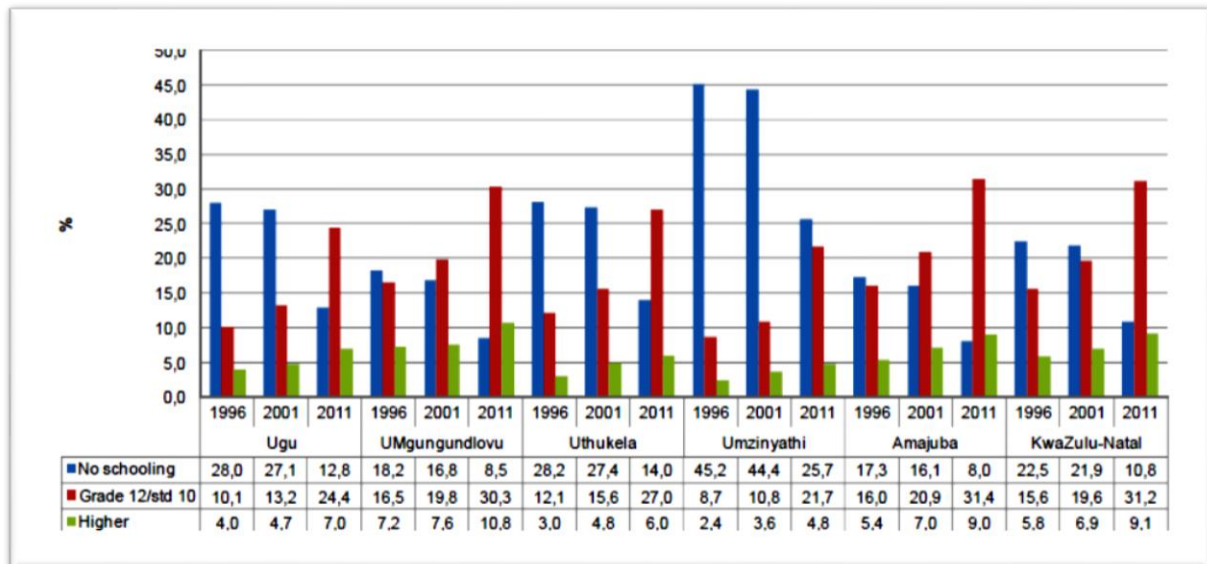
Age is one of the most frequently used variables in explaining voting behaviour. There is general consensus in the literature on electoral participation that on average young people are less inclined to vote than elderly people (Twafik *et al*, 2010: 14-15). Figure 7 below shows population distribution across KZN by age groups. With an average of over 30 percent people between the ages 0-14 and an average of people 65 years and above well below 10 percent, the province's population is a youthful one. This perhaps explains the prevalent disinterest in voting that is common in local elections. People between the ages 15-64 make up more than 60 percent of the population.

**Figure 7: Population distribution by age groups and district municipality 1996, 2001, and 2011.**



Source: Statistics South Africa Census (2011: 18-19).

**Figure 8: Distribution of population by highest level of education attained by district municipality of people 20 years and older 1996, 2001, 2011**

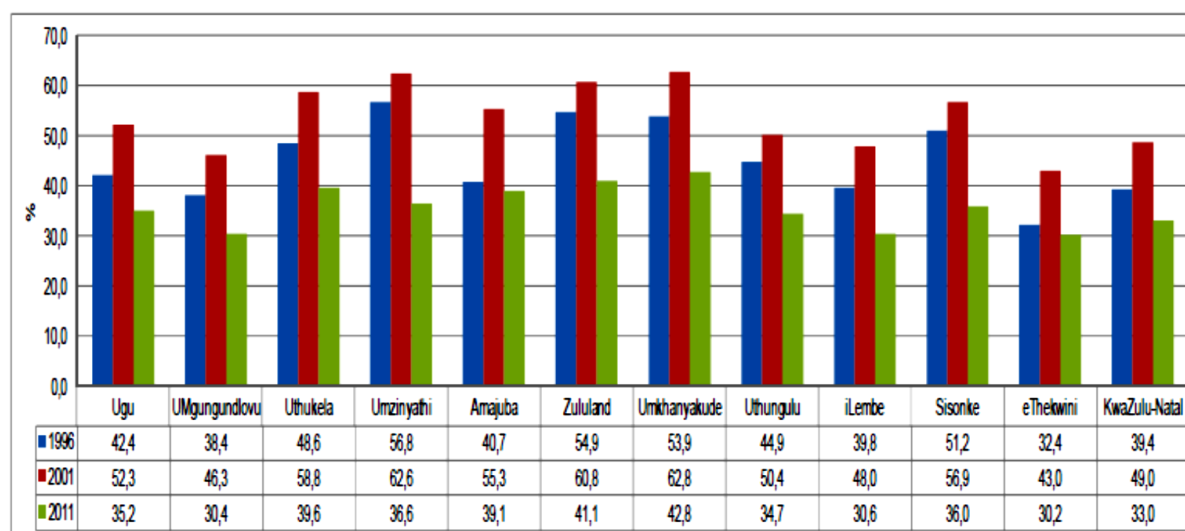


Source: Statistics South Africa (2011: 23-24).

Figure 8 above shows huge variations in the distribution of educated people across the KZN province. Together with age, level of education has been found to be significantly correlated with voting behaviour. Highly educated people are generally more likely to vote than people with less education (Brady et al, 1995:275-276). UMzinyathi, UMkhanyakude, Ugu, and uThukela district municipalities had the highest number of people over 20 years with no

schooling in 1996 and 2001. But these numbers went down drastically in 2011. While more people now pursue their education up to grade 12 – the number of people pursuing education beyond high school is still low though it has improved gradually over the years across the province (Stats SA, 2011: 23).

**Figure 10: Official unemployment rate by district municipality 1996, 2001, and 2011**



Source: Statistics South Africa (2011: 26).

Figure 9 shows a record of the trends in the rate of unemployment in the province's districts. The general trend shows that all the districts witnessed highest unemployment rates in 2001 with an average of 49 percent which was a 10 percentage point increase from an average of 39 percent in 1996. Unemployment rate declined sharply in 2011 to an average of 33 percent. Generally, provinces with a lower unemployment rate are likely to have higher rates of participation in the elections. This is because a lower unemployment rate reflects a strong economy and implies that people have decent if not high incomes and therefore may have a direct interest in government policy and elections (Hansen, Palfrey and Rosenthal, 1987: 17; See also Brady et al, 1995: 273-6).

### 3.12 Qualities of electoral systems: Evaluation criteria

Electoral systems are instruments designed to facilitate what is perhaps the most important political process in modern democracies. Therefore, there is need for electoral engineers to ensure that the systems have the capacity to enhance democracy and maintain credibility of the election process. Scholars have identified several criteria considered essential for an effective and competent electoral system but the importance of the several criteria will differ depending on the context (Norris, 1997: 304). While studies identify and emphasise different



criteria, the most common ones include representation, participation, government effectiveness, fairness and inclusiveness, and accountability (Kersting, 2006: 136-8; Norris, 1997: 304-6; Reynolds et al, 2008: 9-15).

It is impossible for an electoral system to address all these criteria. Oftentimes electoral engineers engage in a series of trade-offs accommodating criteria in order of their importance (Reynolds et al, 2008: 9). For example a majoritarian or FPTP system emphasises accountability and government effectiveness but seems to neglect representation, inclusiveness and fairness. Advocates of the PR system are usually concerned with and seek to promote attributes like inclusive representation, participation and fairness to minor parties while neglecting other attributes such as government effectiveness and accountability (Barone and de Blasio, 2011: 6). A mixed system tries to balance the attributes of the PR and the FPTP systems by merging the mechanics of both systems in ballot structuring and seat allocation processes. The choice of the electoral system is determined by and reflects on the historical, social and political circumstances of the society in question. This section discusses some of the aforementioned criteria with a view to understanding why they are vital for the credibility of an electoral system.

#### **3.12.1 Representativeness**

Equal and balanced representation is essential for democracy to thrive. Electoral systems should be designed in such a way as to avoid the over-representation or under-representation of some groups in society (Norris, 1997: 298-299; Kersting, 2006:137). All groups in the society should be adequately represented according to gender, class, race, age and ethnicity. A representative electoral regime ensures that the votes of people belonging to minority groups or support small parties are not overshadowed by the large parties. For example the FPTP system tends to be biased towards the large parties due to its high threshold of representation to the detriment of smaller parties. PR systems on the other hand tend to give smaller and minority parties a chance to gain representation due to a lower threshold and a more proportional system of seat allocation (Blais and Aarts, 2006:184).

#### **3.12.2 Government effectiveness and accountability**

Accountability of the elected to the electors is central to an effective and efficient democratic system. One of the main criteria against which the quality of the electoral system is evaluated is the ability to produce accountable and responsive governments (Norris, 1997: 304).

Majoritarian systems often produce an outright winner in the elections and one party gets to form the government. This is unlike the PR systems in which coalition governments are more common as parties fail to get the absolute majority of votes required to form government (Shugart, 2001: 174-175).

Parties in PR systems resort to forming coalition governments in which the parties frequently disagree on policy and thus negatively affects government's responsiveness and effectiveness (Jackman, 1987: 408). In coalition governments, blame is easily shifted about making it difficult to hold government accountable. Moreover, FPTP systems encourage politicians to be answerable directly to the voters in their constituencies as they are elected directly by the voters. In the PR systems, however, politicians are elected not on an individual basis but through the party they belong to (Barone and de Blasio, 2011: 17). Under such a set-up, politicians do not have particular constituencies and are more accountable to their party than to the voters. With this in mind, it is important that electoral engineers consider how the electoral system will enhance accountability, effectiveness and responsiveness on the part of the government (Norris, 1997: 304-306).

### 3.12.3 Making elections more accessible and inclusive

This attribute is inextricably linked to the representativeness and accountability criteria. Elections are not meaningful unless they are accessible to every citizen and inclusive of all political parties and groups in the society. Making elections more accessible and inclusive can significantly encourage electoral participation among the electorate which is crucial for a strong democracy. Accessibility of elections can be enhanced through designing a simple and transparent electoral system which voters may find easy to understand and trust.

A simple system means that voters can understand what impact their votes can have on the outcome of the election and therefore is a powerful incentive to participate in the elections. Kersting (2006: 138) argues that an accessible and simple electoral process is important in relation to the legitimacy of the government and the political system in general. PR systems are generally associated with higher turnout and make the elections more accessible to a wider spectrum of citizens and political parties as well. FPTP systems marginalise small parties, narrow the choices available to the voters and therefore undermine the accessibility of elections through reducing options available to the voters (Blais and Aarts, 2006: 184-185; See also Grofman and Selby, 2011: 94-96).



### 3.13 Concluding remarks

South Africa's local election electoral system is fairly straightforward and simple as this chapter has endeavoured to show. The use of the mixed system is meant to incorporate the advantages inherent in both proportional and majoritarian systems, which are mainly balanced representation and accountability. The proportional system is important to mitigate the imbalances that may arise from the outcome of ward-based elections. Moreover, this chapter has argued that because of the growing status of the local government as an independent tier of government with real influence over policy, the importance of local elections cannot be over-emphasised. Hence it is important for citizens to participate in these elections. The next chapter examines the theoretical framework that will underpin this study with a view to clarifying the role of the electoral system in voter turnout in the local elections.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **4.1 Introductory remarks**

Electoral participation, like many other forms of political behavior, has attracted a melting pot of theoretical approaches as scholars try to find a universally applicable model of electoral participation (Lyons and Sinnot, 2003: 2-5). These ambitious attempts at formulating grand theories of electoral participation, while plausible, have often achieved limited success if not outright failure. A host of theoretical frameworks which can be broadly classified into sociological, psychological, economic and institutional models have been developed by various scholars in a bid to understand voter participation dynamics in the elections. A good deal of progress has been made but more remains to be done if a credible general model of electoral participation is to be achieved.

This chapter gives a detailed outline of the theoretical approach that underpins this study. The central hypothesis of this study is that electoral rules played an important role in shaping voter turnout dynamics in the South African 2011 local elections. Indeed in a meta-analysis of the extant literature on factors affecting electoral turnout Geys (2006: 650) concluded that the electoral system should be one of the most important factors in a general model of turnout. Among the things this study wants to ascertain is the direction and extent of the impact of electoral rules on turnout in local elections. The study will attempt to couch this hypothesis in a synthesis of the rational choice and institutional models of electoral participation. Pursuant to delving into the details of this (admittedly uneasy but nonetheless promising) arrangement, the chapter will endeavor to unpack as clearly as possible the supposed relationship between the dependent and independent variables.

This will be done by explaining the central and subsidiary hypotheses which form the basis of this study. Moreover, the chapter will also explain how three critical qualitative elements: electoral costs, electoral choice and electoral decisiveness can be linked and incorporated into the broader framework of this study. Last but not least, the chapter will also give a critical appraisal of the psychological and sociological models of electoral participation with a view to highlight how they complement the framework adopted by this study and where they fall short.

## 4.2 Hypotheses and assumptions

The present study is predicated on several interconnected assumptions about the relationship between the dependent and independent variables (electoral system and rates of electoral turnout respectively). It is these assumptions (expressed in the series of hypotheses below) upon which the theoretical framework and the whole thrust of this study will be based.

*Hypothesis 1:* A significant amount of the variation in voter turnout as measured by the percentage of the VAP which turned out to vote in the 2011 local elections in KZN province can be attributed to the structure (mechanical and psychological effects) of the electoral system. This is with particular regard to the ballot structure, party system, district magnitude, (dis)proportionality in vote-seat balance and the threshold of representation inter alia. These features of the electoral system are likely to have profound psychological effects on the political parties' mobilization drive and voters' likelihood to turnout.

*Hypothesis 2:* A higher district magnitude will encourage a higher voter turnout as smaller parties also have realistic chance of gaining representation due to a large number of seats. A lower district magnitude (as in the case of ward-based elections with only one seat) is likely to have depressing effect on turnout.

*Hypothesis 3:* A more proportional vote-seat conversion method implies that fewer votes are wasted is likely to be positively correlated to turnout as voters feel their vote will make a difference. A disproportional seat allocation on the other hand means that many votes are wasted as they don't count in seat allocation and will therefore demotivate especially supporters of smaller parties to turnout.

*Hypothesis 4:* The effective number of elective and parliamentary parties is positively correlated to turnout levels. The effective number of elective parties means that voters have a wider choice in terms of the party they can vote for. In other words a multi-party system is likely to trigger a higher turnout than a dominant or two-party system.

The above assumptions or hypotheses predict that a more proportional system which is associated with a higher district magnitude, a multi-party system and lower threshold of representation is likely to be associated with a higher turnout. The single-member constituency or the majoritarian system is likely to have a negative effect on turnout. This is due to its association with a higher threshold of representation, a highly disproportional allocation of seats which favours big parties to the detriment of smaller parties and high prevalence of safe seats. This approach will allow us to see if the PR system used alongside

the majoritarian in South Africa's mixed system would mitigate the negative effects the ward-based system is likely to have on turnout.

### 4.3 How the electoral system affects turnout rates: Connecting the dots

The preceding section on hypotheses stated predictions on how the technicalities of the electoral process as defined by the electoral system and are likely to shape the political playing field and thus affect turnout rates. However, the functioning of the electoral system has implications well beyond the technicalities of seat allocation or ballot structure. Electoral systems also have the potential to shape the non-concrete subtle dimensions of the elections which may have a bearing on the participation of the political parties and the voters in the elections (See Norris, 2003: 1-3; Barone and de Blasio, 2011: 16-19). The three dimensions frequently pointed out in the literature include the associated election process costs, the choices offered by the election and the decisiveness of the election (Norris, 2003: 2; Shugart, 2001: 174; Riker and Ordeshook, 1968: 26). Elections exhibit varying degrees of these attributes under different electoral systems. These dimensions will be discussed in turn below with a particular focus on how they weigh in the voters' decision to turnout and the parties' decision to rally voters to the polls thus affecting turnout.

#### 4.3.1 Electoral choice and diversity of options

One of the major ways in which the electoral system affects turnout is in its ability to affect the quality and quantity of choices, both in terms of the number of parties and the policy choices, at the voters' disposal. The availability of choice directly affects the cost-benefit appraisal of participation. A broader choice-base means that potential voters have a chance to pick the best option they consider more likely to accrue the most benefits. Wessels and Schmitt (2008: 21) argue that the institutional system must supply the electorate with meaningful choices as this is likely to lead to higher turnout. Hortala-Vallve and Esteve-Volart (2010: 43-44) found that voter turnout in American elections improved in a multi-dimensional policy space when voters had many choices than in a one-dimensional space with small policy differences between contesting parties. PR systems are generally associated with multiple parties while majoritarian systems generally result in two-party systems (Duverger, 1964: 210-255; Gronlund 2004: 512-516). Thus, according to Duverger (1964: 220) the PR system generally performs better on the effective number of parties than

the majoritarian system (the number of parties with a realistic chance of achieving representation).

This is because in the PR systems even small parties with scattered support have a chance of getting seats in parliament because of the high degree of proportionality between the amount of votes and the number of seats. Blais and Aarts (2006: 185) concur as they argue that in multi-party systems voters have wider choices and are likely to find a party that matches their policy preferences and with more parties come more mobilisations leading to higher overall turnout in the elections. Chen (2011: 300) also points out that PR systems are mostly centrifugal while the majoritarian systems are characteristically centripetal and this is likely to affect the choice voters have going to the elections.<sup>21</sup> If voters have fewer alternatives, so that they have a difficulty finding a party that matches their views, they are less likely to participate.

However, there is a flipside to the electoral choice issue. Barone and de Blasio (2011: 17), argue in terms of the quality and not necessarily the quantity of the choices. They point out that the majoritarian system is likely to generate high quality choices for the elections as the parties present their best candidates with the best chance of winning elections. Since in an SMD system voters vote for an individual not a party, parties will feel the need to forward their best candidates. It is plausible to argue that even though the PR systems do offer the voters a wider range of choice they do not necessarily offer the best candidates, something which may discourage participation as the voters may feel their preferences will not be realised (*Ibid*, 2011: 16). Moreover, PR systems tend to lead to coalition governments due to the failure to produce a clear winner from the competing parties. For example in the 2011 local elections in KZN there were nearly 10 local councils that produced a coalition management as no party managed to gain the absolute majority of seats (IEC, 2014). This was mostly due to the outcome of the PR allocation of seats which distributed seats amongst parties more or less equally. As such, the PR system does provide choice but the choice is less clear and less decisive than in the majority systems.

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<sup>21</sup> Chen (2011) argues that majoritarian systems are likely to result in centripetal party systems in which political parties tend to agree or have the same viewpoint on several issues and thus leaving voters with limited choice. PR systems on the other hand tend to foster centrifugal party systems in which parties' viewpoints on major issues are diverse and therefore offering voters more choice and indirectly encouraging participation.

#### 4.3.2 Electoral decisiveness

The decisiveness of the vote is a central component of the rational choice theory and is an important determinant of the voter's likelihood of turning out (Riker and Ordeshook, 1968: 30). The hypothesis is that the more a voter perceives that their vote will be decisive the more they are likely to participate in the elections. The type of electoral systems in place affects the decisiveness of the vote to varying degrees (Norris, 2003; Chen, 2011; Blais and Aarts, 2006). A voter may perceive a political benefit from casting a vote that is likely to determine the composition of government and its policy agenda or the outcome of referenda issues. Decisiveness is enhanced when elections are anticipated to be close. Voters are likely to feel far greater incentive to get to the polls in close elections than in those where the outcome appears to be a foregone conclusion (Blais and Aarts, 2006: 184; Abramson et al, 2007: 510-511). In close elections a few votes have the potential to swing the outcome in a particular direction, hence every vote is crucial.

Moreover, people do not only vote to elect an individual but vote to elect a government. If voting for a party makes no difference to the composition of the government, voters will not be motivated to turnout since their choices will not be reflected on the outcome (Norris, 2003:2). For example, South Africa's dominant party system means that supporters of the opposition parties are less inclined to participate in the elections as their vote is less likely to affect the composition of government and its policies (See Barwig, 2009: 299). This also raises the issue of 'wasted votes' especially in areas perceived as incumbent party 'strongholds' where the challengers are unlikely to win (Norris, 2003: 5). Jackman (1987: 408) suggests that the tendency of the PR system to produce coalition governments is likely to reduce the decisiveness of the vote and therefore discourage turnout. In a similar line of argument Shugart (2001: 175) came up with the concept of "electoral efficiency" in which identifiability and proportionality are key elements which have an important bearing on the decisiveness of the vote. Shugart (2001)'s argument of how the electoral system design is likely to affect the decisiveness of the vote is worth quoting at length at this point:

The task of a democratic government is to produce a basket of public goods that is preferred over some other basket by as broad a segment of society as is feasible. It follows then that to provide such a link between governmental output and societal demand requires an electoral process that conveys as much information about voter preferences as possible (Shugart, 2001: 174).

The SMD system on the other hand is associated with a high degree of decisiveness in terms of government composition as compared to the PR system and is thus more likely to encourage voter turnout while simultaneously motivating parties to mobilise supporters (Jackman, 1987; Shugart, 2001). The various features of the electoral system such as (dis)proportionality, district magnitude and ballot structure amongst others can affect the decisiveness of the vote and by implication overall voter turnout.

#### 4.3.3 Electoral costs and benefits

Elections are a demanding exercise and involve costs (financially, administratively, logistically and time-wise) for both parties and voters who participate. Electoral systems at the centre of the election process are likely to determine the costs that voters may have to incur as they vote or do not vote. Different electoral systems entail different voter registration methods, ways of demarcating electoral boundaries and the design and production of ballot papers and hence varying electoral costs (IDEA, 2005: 155). For political parties, electoral systems require different campaign strategies in order to reach out to voters. In an FPTP system with numerous small constituencies campaigning is likely to be expensive as parties have to fund campaigns in each and every constituency. A proportional system with large constituencies campaigns can be relatively cheap for the parties as they do not need to campaign everywhere and can centralise their campaign in one area. Norris (2003: 6) and Feddersen (2004: 100) points out that voters incur costs mainly in terms of the amount of time they invest in getting registered thinking about their voting decision and joining the queue to cast their vote on the election day.

As per the rational-choice theory argument, higher electoral costs are likely to dis-incentivise or discourage participation on the part of the voters and mobilisation by the political parties (Hansen, Palfrey and Rosenthal, 1987: 17). Milner (1997: 93) suggests that the impact of the electoral system is most felt in the information dissemination and acquisition costs incurred by political agents and voters respectively. The PR system with a higher district magnitude requires a relatively cheaper information dissemination strategy than what would be necessary under the majoritarian systems. This is different from a majoritarian system where a party has to channel the message through a multitude of ward-based candidates which can be cumbersome and expensive (*Ibid*, 1997: 96). Thus increasing the cost of information acquisition and processing needed to make up one's mind on the preferred party or candidate (Matsusaka, 1995: 93-94). For local elections, which are the subject of this study,

information costs are likely to be lower for both the parties and the candidates than they would be in a national election. This is due to the fact that most candidates standing for a seat in the local council are from the neighbourhood as voters and therefore are able to reach out to voters relatively cheaply. The voters on the other hand can also contact the candidates without incurring significant costs since they are from the same area and easy to reach.

It has also been argued that the simplicity of majoritarian systems stimulates participation unlike the more complicated PR which stifles participation (Geys, 2006: 651). PR systems encourage the emergence of smaller parties able to contest the elections and also promote more centrifugal policy positions which makes it difficult for the voters to understand policy differences between the parties (Chen, 2011: 302). Since proportional systems are generally associated with a low number of wasted votes, the higher costs of non-voting may prompt voters to turnout. Non-voting will risk one's favoured candidate or party losing a seat and the least favoured candidate getting one – this encourages voters to cast their votes (Riker and Ordeshook, 1968: 25-40).

#### 4.4 The rational choice theory

The rational choice model was first developed by Anthony Downs (1957) in his work '*An Economic Theory of Democracy*' drawing parallels between the behavior of the consumer in the market and the voter in electoral politics. It is an individual level model based on the economics principle of 'utility maximization' to explain the electoral behavior of political parties and voters (Downs, 1957: 4-6). Its major assumption is that voters seek to maximize the utility of their vote and parties seek to maximize electoral gains obtained from their proposals and campaigns (Antunes, 2010: 157). Unlike the sociological and the Michigan models wherein individual voters are assumed to be passive, the rational choice model assumes an active and rational voter. The model rests on the assumption that voters are rational individuals whose propensity to vote depends on the ratio of the benefits to the costs of voting and therefore will only vote if their vote can influence the outcome (Riker and Ordeshook 1968; Geys 2006; Gerber et al 2008). It is expressed in a simple equation which portrays how voters and parties alike arrive at the decision whether to turnout to vote or not or to mobilize voters respectively:

$$\Delta U = PB - C$$



Where  $U$  is the utility of voting, where  $P$  is the probability that one's vote will be decisive, where  $B$  is the benefit one derives from the act of voting and where  $C$  is the costs - perceived or real- that comes with the act of voting. Downs (1957: 142) argued that the voter was an instrumental actor who would only vote if the benefits of voting outweigh the costs involved and if there was a probability of influencing the outcome ( $PB > C$ ). That is, voters will only vote if the costs involved do not exceed the benefits accruing from the act. The costs include the time it takes to vote and the process of acquiring information about the parties contesting the elections (Norris, 2003:5). However, since the probability that a single vote will affect the outcome of an election is close to zero, the model has been criticized for failing to explain the high levels of voter turnout in the real world. This is what most scholars refer to as the 'paradox of voting' (Bassat and Dahan 2008: 1; Blais 2000: 140, Green and Shapiro, 1994: 6-7).

The model fails to predict and explain why large numbers of people still participate in the elections even if they don't get any individual benefit. Blais (2000: 2) contends that contrary to the assumptions of the model, the majority of people do vote in elections even though the possible benefits are at best minuscule. Moreover, literature is replete with empirical evidence that the majority of voters do not seek information in order to calculate their decisions in the election carefully (Engelen, 2006: 421; Chen, 2011:296-298). Riker and Ordeshook (1968:25) argue that judging by the size of the electorate in any country,  $P$  (the chance of a vote determining the outcome) tends to be infinitesimally small. As such,  $U$  is usually negative making the act of voting irrational. Recent models have been formulated by scholars to make up for the inherent weaknesses in the original model. Some of the models include the consumption-benefit model by (Riker and Ordeshook, 1968: 28-42; Dowding, 2005: 444-455) which argues that voters may turnout for reasons of civic duty or for the benefit of seeing democracy survive.

In an attempt to rescue the rational choice theory, Riker and Ordeshook (1968: 28-30) revised the original equation to make it more reflective of the real world scenario. They argue that besides the instrumental benefits of voting there are other benefits which may influence individuals to turnout thus making voting rational. They rewrite the original equation thus:

$$R = PB - C + D$$

Where  $R$  is the rewards a voter gets from the act of voting and  $D$  is the benefits the voters get from voting which are not necessarily linked to the outcome. Riker and Ordeshook (1968) identify a number of satisfactions that constitute  $D$ :

1. The satisfaction from complying with the ethic of voting, which, if the citizen is at all socialized into the democratic tradition is positive when he votes and negative when he does not.
2. The satisfaction from affirming one's allegiance to the political system. They argue that since voting is a highly political motive, omitting it in the calculus of voting is preposterous.
3. The satisfaction from affirming one's support or preference for a particular candidate. Voting is a chance for the citizens to stand up for the representative they trust.
4. The satisfaction of having to make the decision whether to go to the polls or not. Riker and Ordeshook argue that some citizens derive satisfaction from making an informed decision on whether to partake in the elections or not.
5. Lastly but not least, is the satisfaction of establishing one's efficacy in the political system. Voting is meaningful for many people in democratic societies and the only opportunity to affirm this is through voting. (Riker and Ordeshook, 1968: 28).

The incorporation of the  $D$  term into original equation of the rational choice certainly increased its appeal as an explanation of turnout decisions among the electorate (Geys, 2006: 19; Engelen, 2006: 423). The model still maintains that the decision to vote is in the main rational as a decision to turnout is determined by what he or she stands to gain (Engelen, 2006). Edlin et al (2005) present a more convincing case for the existence of rational voters. They argue in the social-benefit model of rational voting the people rationalize voting not by selfish instrumental reasons but by broader social preferences (ibid, 2005: 3-4). However, it is not the intention of the present analysis to weigh in on the polemics around the detail of the rational choice theory as a model for voter turnout. Despite all the arguments concerning the detail of the model the core elements of the model still hold: voting is a rational act and people vote with a goal in mind. As Blais (2000:10) aptly suggested "scholars ought to focus on the fundamentals of the model to figure out whether they do influence the decision to vote".

#### 4.5 Institutional Perspective on Voter Turnout

The institution-centered approach to the study of electoral participation is a relatively new model which has been developed and improved by a growing number of scholars (Powell 1986; Jackman 1987; Blais and Carty 1990; Norris, 2003; Endersby and Kriekhaus 2012; Perez-Linan, 2001) in their accounts of turnout. The major contribution of this approach to

the literature on voter turnout lies in its compelling demonstration of the role of political institutions like electoral system, the registration process, the party system, the legislature among others in the variations in voter turnout in different places and times (Norris, 2003: 4-9; Chen, 2011: 299). The approach departs from the previous models in the sense that it shifts the spotlight from the individual voters to the character of the election to explain variations in voter turnout. As Perez-Linan (2001: 282) points out, institutionalists are concerned with how the legal rules and regulations or the structure of the electoral process affects the choices of the political actors (parties and voters).

The model argues that institutions play an important role in the decisions of the electorate on whether to vote because they structure the incentives or disincentives of the voters to participate in the elections (Norris, 2003: 14; Blais and Aarts, 2006: 180-193). On the other hand, electoral laws also influence the political parties' decision on whether to mobilise voters or not (Barwig, 2007: 292). Powell (1986: 25), one of the most notable proponents of the institutionalist approach - found that registration laws and institutional factors, particularly in the United States, seem to suppress electoral turnout far outweighing the otherwise favorable political attitudes of the electorate.

The United States is a classic example of how institutions can depress turnout. According to many studies the U.S. has an electorate bearing attributes like education, political interest and higher socio-economic status that closely correlate with participation (Powell, 1986: 20; Jackman, 1987: 406). However, due to the electoral laws in place the majority of the population is discouraged from participating in the elections as witnessed significantly low turnout (Lipjhart, 1998: 6; Roberts, 2009: 29-31). In a study of 19 established democracies, Jackman (1987: 412) found such institutional factors as multi-partyism, unicameralism<sup>22</sup>, nationally competitive districts and voting laws to significantly influence variations in turnout in the different countries. Norris (2003: 3-4) argues that voting is first and foremost an institutionally governed act and therefore naturally, institutions will affect the rates of electoral participation. The institutionalist perspective per se is characterized by two approaches: the approach that sees institutions as *arenas* of political participation and the approach that views institutions as *agents* of participation (Perez-Linan, 2001: 282).

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<sup>22</sup> Unicameralism refers to a parliamentary system with a single chamber as opposed to a parliamentary system with two chambers in which case it is known as bicameral. For example the South African system is bicameral as it consists of the National Assembly and the Council of Provinces while the British parliamentary system made up of only the House of Commons is unicameral.

The former approach views institutions as passive systems of rules, within the auspices of which, individual voters and political parties make rational decisions. The latter approach on the other hand sees institutions such as parties, electoral commissions and the state, as active parties or systems whose actions can significantly influence the electoral behavior of the potential voters (*Ibid*: 283). The present study will incorporate both approaches because the set of institutions falling under the different categories somehow depend on each other to structure the choices and behaviors of the political actors. However, a caveat is in order at this juncture. The models from which the institutional approach emerged were by and large a reflection of the conditions in the established and industrial democracies in Europe and North America. As such, it would be interesting to see the extent to which these models hold in the context of relatively new democracies like South Africa which, by and large, are still ‘works in progress’. Indeed the application of the model to new democracies has yielded mixed results with Kersting (2006: 139-143) finding institutions to significantly affect variations in turnout in Southern African countries while Perez-Linan (2001: 286) found no such effect in 17 Latin American countries. Hence this study investigates the effects of the electoral system in the KZN voter turnout in municipal elections with guarded optimism.

#### 4.6 The Institutional-Rational Choice Theory: The Link

The central hypothesis of the present study is that electoral institutions are an important determinant of, even if partly, the variations in voter turnout in the municipal elections among the local councils of KZN and South Africa in general. Different electoral systems<sup>23</sup>, for example the single-member district (SMD) and the PR, determine among other things, the number of parties competing, the policy positions adopted by different parties and structure competition amongst parties (Chen, 2011: 299; Blais and Aarts, 2006: 190). That said, this study merges the institutionalist and rational-choice frameworks to explain electoral participation in the 2011 local elections in KZN. The rational choice theory contends that political actors are rational actors whose propensity to participate in the elections is based on

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<sup>23</sup> Chen (2011) points out that different electoral rules shape distinctive styles of competition among political parties. For example the effective threshold of representation is lower in PR systems than in SMD systems. As such, PR systems tend to have a higher number of effective parties and promote a multiparty system. While the SMD weeds out smaller parties thus creating a two or three party system. This is why PR tends to correlate with high turnout since even the supporters of the smaller parties will go to vote as small parties have a realistic chance of gaining representation.

a cost-benefit analysis of the act (Antunes, 2010: 158). The theory holds that voters and the political parties will need incentives to participate or mobilise supporters to participate in the elections. The theory hypothesizes that if incentives<sup>24</sup> are absent the voters and the political parties alike will stay away. That is, if the costs outweigh the benefits then participating in the elections is unlikely to be considered a worth-while exercise, prompting the voters and the agents to stay away thus resulting in lower turnout levels.

The institutional accounts of electoral participation point out that various institutions, particularly the electoral system design, can fundamentally shape the (dis)incentives of electoral participation and thus affect the turnout levels (Barwig, 2007: 290; Perez-Linan, 2001: 287). Rakner (1996: 2) suggests that institutions are important intervening variables with the potential to affect a voter's choice but nevertheless not determining it. Features of the electoral system such as (dis)proportionality, district magnitude, ballot structure, electoral threshold among others have been found to affect the voters' calculus of participation and the parties' calculus of mobilisation (Chen, 2011; Kersting 2007; Endersby and Kriekhaus, 2012; Jackman and Miller, 1995). Moreover Birch (2008: 306) contends that the rules of the electoral game can be biased and designed so as to give one actor an upper hand over others. The mechanics of the electoral system will have definitive psychological effects on the political actors in electoral politics and thus influence the level of voter turnout. Chen (2011: 299) argues that electoral systems determine policy positions taken by the political parties and therefore indirectly influence the likely benefits of voting for the potential voters. PR systems tend to promote centrifugal policy positioning while SMD systems are mostly centripetal.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, the approaches of the present study sit well with the main arguments of the rational choice and institutional theories of electoral turnout. The rational-choice model demonstrates that voting is a rationally motivated act with voters voting with a goal in mind. The institutionalist model has shown that institutions can affect how voters and political parties

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<sup>24</sup> Geys (2008) argues that recent improvements in the theory of voter turnout like the Ethical voter, Consumption-benefit model, the altruistic model, the civic-duty model and the game-theoretic model show that the nature of the incentives that motivate individuals to turnout and cast their votes varies with each individuals and context. The underlying assumption across the board though, is that in the absence of these incentives rational political actors will find participation meaningless.

<sup>25</sup> Cox (1990: 903) states that electoral systems can be distinguished by the degree to which they promote centrifugal and centripetal incentives. Centrifugal incentives lead parties to adopt centrist policies, that is, policies that converge. Centripetal incentives are characterised by more or less extreme and divergent policy positions. These incentives are products of the electoral systems and the competition which arises therefrom.

weigh the possible benefits of participating. Thus institutions can indirectly affect the overall levels of turnout in the elections. This research problematizes the relationship between the various features of the electoral system and the level of electoral participation. The electoral laws and regulations present varying incentives or disincentives to participate and therefore affect the political actors' propensity to participate in the elections. Norris (2003: 2) identifies the crucial areas like electoral costs (in registering and voting), electoral choices (the number of parties), and electoral decisiveness (the extent to which the outcome would reflect the electorate's preferences), in which the electoral system is likely to shape electoral behaviour.

#### 4.7 The Sociological Model

One of the widely acclaimed models of voter turnout is the sociological model whose roots can be traced to a pioneering research study of a distinguished American sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld and his associates in their seminal work *The People's Choice* (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1944). This was later followed by another influential work *Voting: A study of opinion formation in a presidential campaign* (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, 1954). These works constitute the foundations for a broader school of thought. Although their works were more concerned with the question of voter choice and less about voter turnout, their findings had, all the same, an important bearing on the understanding of the latter. Indeed, Engelbert (2006: 426) correctly observes that the decisions on how to vote and whether to vote or not are inextricably linked since a person would seldom turnout to vote if they had no preferred choice in the first place. This model argues that voting behavior, and by implication any kind of political behavior, was by and large a function of one's social background rather than attitudes (Wiese, 2011: 32). In other words, voting behavior was the end-product of a socialization process. Berelson et al (1954: 310) state that for the majority of voters, political behavior is similar to cultural tastes in music, literature, dress and social behavior in that both have their origins in family, class, and ethnic traditions. These attributes are generally stable and resistant to change.

The socio-economic status (SES) model as it has come to be known seeks to explain voter participation by examining socio-economic status factors like religion, age, education, class, profession, race and ethnicity among other factors (Antunes, 2010: 147). The model has since been corroborated by the findings of Brady, Verba and Schlozman (1995)'s resource model of political participation in which they discovered money, time and civic skills to be the

prime factors that affect one's propensity to cast a vote or stay away (p. 271). In their inquiry they found the availability of these resources to be linked to one's level of education, income, ethnicity and religion. Liu and Chiu (2011: 266) also found social networks to be crucial determinants of an individual's political participation record in Taiwan elections. To put it simply, the sociological model views political behavior, particularly voting behavior, as socially embedded. One's social situation can be a reliable predictor of their voting behavior. However the model has been criticized for sociological determinism as it reduces all political behavior to social explanations. Critics have also pointed out that the model is largely static as it fails to explain why voting participation differs within culturally homogenous groups where some people vote against their social backgrounds or norms (Antunes, 2010: 153; Bartel, 2008: 4).

In a way this model shows how social institutions like family and religion can shape the behavior of voters in terms of their likelihood to participate in the elections (Antunes, 2010: 146-7). It is, in important ways, similar to the model used for this study save for the fact that the current model investigates the influence of official and codified institutions rather than natural and un-codified institutions like social norms and structures. As it were, the institutional and sociological models are underpinned by and share the same logic that views voting behavior as embedded in larger social structures and processes (macro-level).

#### 4.8 The Michigan/ Party Identification Model

The other model that has been influential in the current understanding of voter turnout is the Michigan, psychological or party identification model. It was by and largely a corrective extension of the sociological model that addresses its inability to explain changes and deviations in electoral behavior from individuals (Bartel, 2008: 8). It is a more sophisticated model locating and linking the role of psychological, sociological and political factors in voting behavior in a way that transcends specific elements of historical circumstances (Kavanagh, 1983: 82). The model was developed after a long-running study of voters and non-voters in American presidential elections by social scientists from the University of Michigan initially from 1952 to 1956.

According to Bartel (2008:7) the model made a "great leap forward" in various dimensions and produced an important landmark in the enterprise of electoral research. Central to its explanatory framework are concepts like political attitudes, beliefs, expectations and values

party identification or partisanship<sup>26</sup> and the funnel of causality<sup>27</sup> (Wiese, 2011: 36). This theory established that voting behavior can also be a function of individual attitudes and psychological predisposition more than anything else. It showed that while social background may be important, it nonetheless played a background role which could be easily eclipsed by other temporary and short-term factors. Voting behavior, the model maintains, can be swayed by more immediate factors like the issues dominating the election and the candidates involved (Bartel, 2008: 10).

A person therefore can exhibit a voting behavior that is traditionally incongruent with their social background because of the issues (economic or political crisis) or the personality of the candidates competing for office without shifting allegiance to another party (Antunes, 2010: 156). The strength of this model lies in its assumption, shared by the model underlying this study, of an active voter. It acknowledges the important role of the larger social and political forces but does not overlook the effect of individual predispositions and short-term factors on political participation. It discards the notion that voters are unchanging and simply conform to the wider social practices and expectations in their political behavior. In the same manner, the mechanics of the electoral system do affect the voters psychologically and influences them to behave in a certain way (abstain or turn out). The Michigan model shows that voters may be influenced psychologically by exogenous factors. However, the downside of the model is that it fails to apply its concepts especially that of partisanship, to political systems that are not essentially two-party systems like many countries in Africa and Europe (Antunes, 2010: 157).

#### 4.9 Concluding remarks

This chapter has explored and discussed the theoretical paradigms of voting behavior. While some of the theories like the Michigan and sociological models looked beyond voter turnout to focus on voting choice they nonetheless harbor important and enlightening implications about voter turnout. The sociological model offers a macro-level perspective on the determinants of voter participation and shows that voting behavior does not take place in a vacuum but is determined by the wider environment. It therefore rests on a more or less

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<sup>26</sup> Party identification is defined by Antunes (2010) as a psychological predisposition, stable and durable relationship with a political party that does not necessarily translate to consistent voting and systematically militancy with the political party.

<sup>27</sup> A metaphor used to explain voting behaviour that implies a chain or string of events classified into distal factors (socio-economic, history and values) and proximal factors like issues, candidates and government action that contribute to an individual's electoral behaviour.



similar continuum with the institutional analysis of voter turnout which argues that voting behavior is to a large extent a function of the institutional context. The Michigan model goes a step further to claim that voting behavior can be explained by micro and macro-level variables. It argues that while the wider environment constitutes an important factor, there is no gainsaying the considerable influence of individual attributes like attitude, values, political interest and psychological on voting behavior. Moreover, the model underscores the idea of an actively involved voter whose behavior is not just a reflection of outside forces. These theories sit well with and to certain extent reinforce the inherent claims of the rational choice institutionalism that will be employed in this study. Rational choice institutionalism argues that institutions like the electoral system have the capacity to (dis)incentivize voters and political parties' participation in the elections and thus affect turnout rates. The next chapter will focus on the methodological and research design frameworks to be used for this study. It will clarify the conceptualization and operationalization of the dependent and independent variables selected in tandem with the underlying theoretical framework of this study.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### METHODOLOGY, METHODS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

#### 5.1 Introductory remarks

According to Dawson (2007:15) research methodology is the philosophy or the undergirding principle that governs and guides the conduct or the process of research. The methods and techniques used directly determine the quality and credibility of the research process and output. The importance of caution in the choice of methods and methodology in conducting a study cannot be over-emphasized. This study uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in an attempt to answer the posed research question and the subsidiary questions arising therefrom. The phenomenon of voter participation is one that can utilize both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. This study is entirely based on secondary data gathered via desktop research. For data collection the study will rely on the relevant government departments' websites especially that of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) which has a comprehensive record of voter turnout in the elections. This chapter will discuss the dependent and independent variables in detail outlining how they will be operationalized in this study in order to answer the research question comprehensively. The dependent variable in this case will be voter turnout – which refers to the number of people who cast their votes in the 2011 local elections in KZN. The independent variable, the electoral system, will be broken down into different components like the ballot structure, district magnitude and disproportionality among others, which the study assumes have a differential and significant impact on voting participation.

#### 5.2 Quantitative and qualitative methods: The debate

Research methodologies are usually classified into qualitative and quantitative approaches under whose broad umbrellas fall a plethora of research methods. There is a long-standing debate in the academia on the merits and demerits of quantitative and qualitative approaches to research. Qualitative research is an approach that systematically explores attitudes, behaviors and experiences regarding various social and political phenomena (Neuman, 2006). It generates an in-depth and detailed, non-numerical opinion or presentation of patterns between two or more variables or a social phenomenon under investigation (Bernard, 2000: 417). Speckler et al (1992: 4) point out that the chief purpose of qualitative research is not to answer empirical questions but to illuminate various viewpoints on important issues.

Quantitative research on the other hand, reduces a social phenomenon or process to numerical data for ease of interpretation. It is usually conducted through surveys or structured and close-ended interviews and correlational, cross-sectional, cluster or factor analysis (Bernard, 2000: 418). It is mostly based on statistical information and is suited for measuring the strength of a relationship between two or more variables to generate a generalizable theory (Dawson, 2007: 16). Scholars use quantitative techniques to find out how much one variable affects change in another variable, to establish the cause and effect relationship or lack thereof.

Scholars have divided opinions about the differences between these methodologies with some being sympathetic to the qualitative paradigm while others favour the quantitative approach. This stand-off has seen the two camps taking turns to criticize and question the validity of the other approach while praising the qualities of the approach they support. As Steckler et al (1992: 4) argues, the proponents of the two paradigms argue that these paradigms are too different that any attempt to integrate them destroys the epistemological foundations of each. The conflict has been best explained thus:

When you cannot measure it, when you cannot express it numbers, your knowledge is of meagre and unsatisfactory kind (Lord Kelvin).

When you can measure it, when you can express it numbers, your knowledge is still of meagre and unsatisfactory kind (Jacob Viner) (Sayer, 1992: 175).

Dawson (2007: 16) points out that the debate between the two camps has revolved around the issue of which is the best and more scientific methodology. This concerns the ability of the approaches to produce credible and reliable research outcomes. Steckler et al (1992) argue that these differences originate from fundamental philosophical, metaphysical and ethical differences which will be difficult to disentangle and reconcile. The conflict emanates from the assumption that these two paradigms of research and their accompanying tools or techniques are incompatible and cannot be used together. However, over the years, there has been an emergence of a more moderate camp making efforts to find common ground between these two approaches. Most scholars (Dawson, 2007; Steckler et al, 1992; Bernard, 2000) counsel peace and reconciliation between the two paradigms as a pragmatic and realistic goal

The assumed conflict between qualitative and quantitative must be abandoned in favor of the view that these terms merely represent different stages of refinement and objectivity in our technique of description. Even in the work of the most statistically minded, qualitative analysis will keep its place. In the thinking of competent workers, the two types of analysis

will cooperate with and complement each other peacefully in economics as they do in chemistry (Lundberg, 1946: 23-24).

The methodology a researcher chooses influences and shapes data collection and data analysis techniques, and therefore affects the quality of the research output (Walker, 1995: 149). This study is guided by the view that the two research paradigms are inexplicably intertwined and therefore adopts an approach that incorporates important elements of both qualitative and quantitative paradigms. Due to the nature of the research though, the study will be predominantly, though not exclusively, be based on the quantitative methods and techniques. The nature of the variables being investigated in this study lends themselves neatly to a quantitative analysis. The electoral system, which is the independent variable, unlike other social or political phenomena, is a stable institutional feature whose various components can be calibrated and their effects measured. The stability of the electoral system, moreover, also makes it a good deal generalizable to the wider South African context. Electoral turnout on the one hand, largely because it is recorded in numbers, is perhaps the most amenable to measurement of all the political phenomena (Kavanagh, 1983).

However, while the different components of the electoral system are relatively clear-cut and fairly easy to measure, there are also other qualitative aspects of the electoral system that do affect turnout but are not as readily measurable. Kersting (2006: 136) identifies such aspects as representation, simplicity, transparency, concentration and participation as qualities of an electoral system that may have a significant bearing on electoral turnout. For example, a simple electoral system will be easy for the electorate and the parties alike to grasp, and therefore enable them to have a clear view of what and how they stand to gain by participating in the elections. Valuable insight on the relationship between electoral systems and turnout can be gained from a detailed discussion of these aspects. It is these dimensions that necessitated the incorporation of qualitative methods of inquiry in order to offer to fully capture the dynamics of the relationship between electoral rules and electoral turnout.

Quantitative techniques are more effective in ascertaining the extent to which the various components of the electoral system mentioned in this study affect variations in turnout in the electoral districts of KZN. Moreover, Steckler et al (1992: 2) argue that the high degree of reliability of quantitative techniques makes the results of the research generalizable to a wider context. Qualitative techniques on the other hand, would be more effective complimenting the strengths and compensating for the shortcomings of the quantitative methods and thus making the research model more robust. Qualitative techniques will help in discussing the

possible ways in which such aspects of the electoral system as the degree of representativeness, transparency, fairness among others may shape turnout. The decision to utilize methods and techniques of both approaches so as to make use of those which may help yield a well-rounded and balanced analysis of how electoral rules influence turnout trends in the local elections.

### 5.3 Methodological approaches employed by previous studies

The field of electoral research has over the years assembled a substantial inventory of data gathering and data analysis techniques tailored to answer research questions on various phenomena. Some of the techniques include cross-sectional analysis, longitudinal analysis, survey data analysis, ecological analysis and correlational analysis. The scope of research ranges from local to cross-national studies. The choice of a specific research method or technique is guided by the nature of the research question as well as the type and availability of data being dealt with. This section discusses each of these research methods and how they have been used in previous studies with a view to selecting the method that best fits the present study.

- a) *Cross-sectional analysis* is one of the most widely used methodologies used in electoral research (Jackman, 1987; Jackman and Milner, 1995; Blais and Dobryznka, 1998; Norris, 2003; Barwig, 2009). It involves a broad-based analysis of multiple independent variables believed to have an impact on the dependent variable: in this case voter turnout. Lazarsfeld et al (1944) offered one of the earliest examples of cross-sectional analysis when they examined how a host of factors like religion, class and education affected the electorate's voting behaviour in the presidential elections in the United States. In a study of the impact of electoral rules on turnout in the Moroccan elections Barwig (2009) used a host of independent variables like the district magnitude, population size, socio-economic status, proportionality and the party system among others.

Brady et al (1995)'s resource model of political participation used a number of independent variables like money, time and civic skills to understand how socio-economic status affects political participation. Scholars use multiple variables to shed light on how the different variables, which are usually just different dimensions of a single phenomenon, can affect the dependent variations in the dependent variable. In the same vein, this study employs a cross-sectional analysis technique to examine how

different ballot structures, disproportionality, party system and district magnitude determine the level of turnout in the various electoral districts in the KZN province. While these variables are all features of or functions of the structure of the electoral system there is reason to suspect that they may exercise independent influence on the voter participation patterns. This is reason that their impact will be examined separately.

b) *Longitudinal analysis* has been used in a number of studies in electoral research (Denny and Doyle, 2008; Blais and Dobrynska, 1998; Lipjhart, 1994; Bourbeau and Scruggs, 2007). It is a research strategy that involves the repeated observation and monitoring of the effect of several independent variables and turnout variation over time (usually decades) for a specific country or a group of countries in national or local elections. Longitudinal analysis is used in cohort or panel studies. For example Lipjhart (1994: 45) investigates how a change in the electoral rules of different countries affected district magnitude, assembly size and effective threshold. Gallego et al (2011) used cross national longitudinal data from 1977 to 2008 to examine the impact of disproportionality of electoral systems on turnout in the long term.

In an example of a cohort study, Denny and Doyle (2008) investigated the effect of political interest, cognitive ability and personality on voter turnout in the 1997 British election using the longitudinal data set of the National Child Development Survey for people born in 1958. Longitudinal and cross-sectional analyses do overlap in their investigation of several independent variables. They only differ in that longitudinal studies observe these variables continuously over a long period of time. However, the downside of longitudinal research is that it is slow and expensive and cannot be used to establish a cause and effect relationship between different variables. Moreover, South Africa is a young democracy and has only had three local elections and five national elections, hence longitudinal research would be severely limited in this context.

c) *Correlational analysis* is a quantitative research technique used to measure the strength of a relationship between two variables in terms of the extent to which a change in one variable corresponds to a change in another. It is one of the most popular techniques in electoral research (Barwig, 2009; Fuvelle-Aymar, 2006; Czenisk, 2006; Norris, 2003; Jackman and Miller, 1995). Correlational studies use

statistical techniques and procedures such as regression analysis, factor analysis and cluster analysis to study the impact of various factors on electoral participation dynamics. These techniques are used to calculate and account for the variation in the dependent variable which in this case is voter turnout. For example, Powell (1986) and Jackman (1987) used multiple regression analysis to study the impact of such factors as multi-partyism, national districts and ballot on voter turnout levels in a number of countries.

In a cross-national examination of the effect of electoral systems on turnout, Endersby and Kriekhaus (2008) used the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression technique to analyse the relationship between the two variables. Depending on the nature of variables being investigated, scholars have used various methods like logistic regression, multiple regression and ordinary least squares in measuring the strength of the correlation between the independent and dependent variable. The present study also seeks to cast more light on the relationship between the various components of the electoral system and voter turnout. For example, one of the aims of this study is to find out whether the number of seats (district magnitude) in an electoral district is positively or negatively correlated with the levels of voter turnout. There is ample empirical evidence in the previous literature that district magnitude is positively correlated with voter turnout (Norris, 2003; Blais and Dobrynska, 1998; Chen, 2011).

## 5.4 Data collection

### *Desktop research*

This study is based entirely on desktop research. Desktop research, as the name indicates, is a fairly effective research technique in which information is assembled, evaluated, collected and analysed on using the library and online sources (Business Dictionary, <http://www.businessdictionary.com>, accessed 2 September 2014). Desktop is different from field research because the latter a study is based on primary sources of data like observation, interviews and surveys. A desktop study is based on secondary sources of information. The information is sourced from online libraries, newspaper archives, government, unpublished masters and doctorate theses, relevant websites, conference papers, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and other repositories

(Dawson, 2007). Information on most government departments is easily accessible on the internet or at government offices. Though fraught with limitations as a research technique, desktop research is particularly effective for surveying previous literature and getting a handle on the topic or research problem one is dealing with (Wiese, 2011). The downside of desktop research however, is that the researcher has to depend on previous studies and does not engage the phenomenon under investigation in the field. Therefore, what might be gained by way of convenience and cost-cutting comes with losses on originality and depth.

However, for the present study this is not much of an issue as information on the voting patterns of the electorate and the electoral system is comprehensively covered in the government websites and other sources. That is, there is no need to go out into the field to find out how the electoral system works or how many people voted in the election in question as comprehensive records are available from the relevant government departments. This study relies on the information on the websites of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)<sup>28</sup> which has a comprehensive record of voter turnout rates for all the elections in South Africa. The data on the IEC website covers all the places in South Africa from ward level upwards. The Statistics South Africa (StatsSA)<sup>29</sup> also has comprehensive data on social and economic trends covering the country's nine provinces. This information will be useful in controlling for factors like the socio-economic development levels and the social demographics of the areas under study that may also contribute to variations in turnout levels other than the electoral system. Controlling for these factors will make the model of the relationship between the electoral system and the level of turnout more robust and accurate.

## 5.5 Operationalization of the Dependent Variable

The debate on how voter turnout or electoral participation should be calculated and measured has featured prominently in electoral research and has divided opinion amongst scholars (McDonalds and Popkin, 2001: 963-4; Roberts, 2009: 3-4). How can electoral participation be measured most effectively? Using the number of those who turnout to vote, those who abstain or the number of people of registered to vote even though some did not eventually

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<sup>28</sup> The Independent Electoral Commission is one of the Chapter 9 institutions embedded in South Africa's constitution and was established in 2000 with the primary mandate of being the impartial and non-aligned manager of the country's electoral processes. It is responsible for providing the logistics needed for the elections, counting the votes, vetting the political parties and individuals contesting the elections and announcing the results of the elections. It manages both the national, provincial and local elections.

<sup>29</sup> Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) is the official national statistics authority in the country. It is tasked with the responsibility of producing accurate demographic, economic and social surveys in order to guide government planning and interventions and promote economic and social development.



turnout? These are some of the central questions this section intends to address with a view to clarifying the operationalization of the dependent variable. A survey of the literature on voter turnout shows that what constitutes the legitimate measurements of the phenomenon is far from a settled issue. In an extensive examination of 83 aggregate-level studies, Geys (2006: 639) revealed that 36 studies measure voter turnout by the voting age population, 23 by the number of registered voters, 13 by the number of eligible voters while 10 had no clear reference. Most studies calculate the percentage of voter turnout by dividing the number of votes cast in an election by the number of registered voters (Blais and Dobrynska, 1998; Franklin, 2004; Kersting, 2009; Fauvelle-Aymar, 2006, Kuenzi and Lambright, 2007).

Kuenzi and Lambright (2007: 673) justify their use of the percentage of registered voters to measure turnout by missing data in a significant number of countries in their dataset. Moreover, they argue that the use of registered voters is convenient as it avoids the issue of the ease or difficulty of the registration process for the voters. The method has however been criticized for inflating the percentage of voter turnout as it leaves out eligible but unregistered citizens (Southall and Daniels, 2010). Endersby and Kriekhaus (2008:602) give a more compelling argument against the use of registered voters as the denominator in measuring voter turnout:

It is important to keep in mind that the act of voting requires two separate acts, namely registering to vote and voting per se. If a causal force is to generate greater turnout, it needs to motivate citizens to first register and then follow through with a vote. Naturally, the two acts are correlated since citizens who are sufficiently motivated to register will also be more inclined to vote. If registration and voting are correlated, however, then the ratio of voters to registered voters is a biased measure of citizen's motivation to vote. We have essentially eliminated all voters who were not sufficiently motivated to register in the first place, and this drops from the analysis a large part of the variation in citizen's willingness to engage in voting behaviour. After all, we are ultimately interested in knowing why some citizens vote and others do not, so it does not make sense to drop the large number of citizens who decide to forgo both voting and registration. (Endersby and Kriekhaus, 2008:602).

In an attempt to correct this some studies use the Voting Age Population (VAP) as the denominator in calculating the percentage of voter turnout (Jackman, 1987; Jackman and Miller, 1995; Norris, 2002). However this method has been criticized for deflating the voter turnout as it might include a substantial number of non-citizens (Kersting 2009; Roberts 2009; Blais and Dobrynska, 1998). An innovative method attempting to solve these differences was devised by McDonald and Popkin (2001: 964) known as the Voting Eligible Population (VEP) Roberts (2009: 5). Using this method an estimated amount of the non-eligible population (say 10%) is subtracted from the VAP the result of which is added to the

number of overseas voters<sup>30</sup>. This is to ensure that voter turnout reflects the percentage of those who are eligible to vote. This method would be appropriate for this study since South Africa has a substantial proportion of non-eligible citizens in the voting age population but the lack of reliable data on the number of non-eligible citizens in the country makes it difficult to apply.

However, the present study will use the VAP method to calculate voter turnout in the KZN 2011 local elections for two principal reasons. Firstly, while the VEP does increase the accuracy of voter turnout, the KZN province with a net migration of just over 16 000 does not have a substantial number of non-citizens which significantly alters the measurement of voter turnout (StatsSA, 2013). Secondly an Afrobarometer survey in 2013 revealed that the registration process was relatively effective with very few people reporting having any difficulties with getting registered to vote. This makes it possible to include the people who did not register in accounting for turnout in the local elections. This study will rely on the 2011 Census population estimates in the province to calculate turnout in the different electoral districts in the province as table 4 below shows. This study argues that the impact of the electoral system also shapes the voters motivation to register and the parties' incentives to mobilize voters to get registered. Therefore using only the number of people registered to vote does not give a complete picture of how the electoral system influences voter participation rates. The dependent variable will be calculated thus:

$$\text{Voter Turnout} = \frac{\text{Voting Age Population (VAP)}}{\text{Number of people who voted}}$$

For each of the 51 local councils in KZN which constitute the electoral districts in this study voter turnout will be calculated as a percentage of the voting age population as estimated by the Stats SA in 2011. While this risks deflating the turnout levels by including the alien population, this is insignificant compared to the exclusion of the sheer number of potential voters who do not register to vote.

**Table 6: The voting age population and voter turnout statistics in KZN's local municipalities**

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<sup>30</sup> McDonald and Popkin argue that declining turnout rates is a myth that is created by errors in the measurement or calculation of voter turnout. They point out that the inadvertent inclusion of alien populations in counting the VAP number contributes to the apparently low levels of voter engagement in the American elections.

<b>Local municipality</b>	<b>VAP est. 2011</b>	<b>Registered voters</b>	<b>Voter turnout</b>	<b>% voter turnout-registered voters</b>	<b>%voter turnout-VAP</b>
Impendle	20 627	15 719	9 714	61.60%	47.09361516
Mkhambathini	43 135	28 882	19 213	66.46%	44.54155558
Mpofana	26 610	15 870	9 626	60.58%	36.17437054
Msunduzi	453 923	282 708	176 361	62.30%	38.85262478
Richmond	43 731	28 729	17 751	60.55%	40.59134253
uMngeni	70 143	44 832	30 293	67.42%	43.18748842
uMshwathi	71 492	49 540	33 338	67.06%	46.63179097
Ezinqoleni	32 761	23 343	15 165	64.63%	46.28979579
Hibiscus	183 876	124 629	79 822	63.95%	43.41077683
Umdoni	57 738	38 411	24 173	62.80%	41.86670823
Umuziwabantu	57 492	37 819	24 701	65.11%	42.9642385
uMzumbe	101 242	73 021	44 992	61.22%	44.44005452
Vulamehlo	51 479	37 839	24 873	65.61%	48.31678937
AbaQulusi	133 659	84 131	50 966	60.53%	38.13136414
eDumbe	49 245	32 274	20 113	62.29%	40.84272515
Nongoma	113 047	81 552	52 899	64.83%	46.79381142
Ulundi	112 852	83 874	54 700	65.16%	48.47056322
uPhongolo	77 211	51 808	31 969	61.67%	41.40472213
Emnambithini	158 428	99 750	62 295	62.41%	39.32070089
Imbabazane	70 697	47 243	31 234	66.09%	44.18009251
Indaka	58 712	40 710	26 488	65.04%	45.1151383
Okhahlamba	80 242	53 300	33 626	63.01%	41.90573515
uMtshezi	54 585	34 836	24 161	69.30%	44.26307594
Greater Kokstad	45 086	36 849	20 424	55.35%	45.30009316
Ingwe	60 570	44 137	28 513	64.46%	47.0744593
Kwa Sani	9 776	6 959	4 236	60.87%	43.33060556
Ubuhlebezwe	63 703	45 216	27 429	60.60%	43.0576268
uMzimkhulu	106 687	77 292	48 152	62.14%	45.13389635
uMhlathuze	236 350	154 544	90 541	58.57%	38.30801777

Mfolozi	78 540	59 141	40 541	68.34%	51.61828368
Mthonjaneni	29 484	22 731	13 811	60.74%	46.84235518
Nkandla	68 315	49 242	30 183	61.27%	44.18209764
Ntambana	45 161	32 449	21 044	64.75%	46.59772813
uMlalazi	134 067	96 727	60 602	62.56%	45.20277175
Endumeni	44 507	24 500	14 045	57.28%	31.55683376
Msinga	99 908	75 067	51 606	68.63%	51.65352124
Nquthu	119 946	65 776	40 572	61.65%	33.82522135
Umvoti	93 166	44 464	28 306	63.48%	30.38232832
Hlabisa	42 174	28 299	18 581	65.02%	44.0579504
Jozini	109 553	79 143	50 132	63.28%	45.76049948
Mtubatuba	106 357	73 367	43 853	59.71%	41.23188883
The Big 5 False Bay	22 032	16 239	10 180	62.63%	46.20551924
uMhlabyalin gana	93 802	65 406	41 201	62.83%	43.9233705
KwaDukuza	164 156	103 240	65 429	63.29%	39.85781817
Mandeni	91 836	62 397	37 054	59.30%	40.34801167
Maphumulo	57 422	43 023	27 474	63.79%	47.8457734
Ndwendwe	88 572	63 889	41 485	64.85%	46.83760105
Dannhauser	63 095	40 545	24 987	61.56%	39.60218718
eMadlangeni	22 094	11 587	7 124	61.46%	32.24404816
Newcastle	246 276	149 136	89 614	60.04%	36.38763014
eThekwini metropolitan	2 576 081	1 666 549	990 263	59.30%	38.44067791

Source: The Independent Electoral Commission website, [www.elections.org.za](http://www.elections.org.za). The VAP estimates obtained from Stats SA's 2011 census estimates.

## 5.6 Operationalization of independent variables

There are a multitude of factors that influence turnout rates in significant ways. Measuring and isolating their individual influence on turnout is certainly not an easy task. When considering how the main independent variable, the electoral system, shapes turnout, this study breaks the variable into its constituent components reflecting the mechanical features and effects of the electoral system. The rules governing how seats are allocated under these two systems strongly affect the way the parties and the voters alike approach or strategize towards the elections (Boix, 1999: 609). The independent variables to be investigated include

the district size, threshold of representation, disproportionality, effective number of parties (both parliamentary and elective), and the competition index. District size however only applies to the PR system under which electoral districts can have varying numbers of seats (multi-member districts). It is impossible to include district size as an explanatory factor under the SMD system since it is always one seat per ward. Moreover, while South Africa uses the same electoral rules for every constituency, it is still possible to compare the differential impact of the electoral system in different electoral districts since it does not apply in equal measure in every constituency. The attributes or components of the electoral system like disproportionality, district size, effective number of parties and more are continuous variables. Therefore in some constituencies, the electoral system is more proportional than in other constituencies, making possible the application of regression analysis on the impact of electoral rules in KZN's 51 local municipalities.

- a) *District Size (DS)*: district size (sometimes referred to as district magnitude) is used here to refer to the number of wards or council seats each local municipality (the electoral district) offers. Lipjhart (1994) and Blais and Aarts (2006) argue that district size is perhaps the most important factor in determining the extent to which the electoral system can be regarded as proportional.

**Table 7: Shows the number of seats per local council in the KZN province**

Local council	Seats	Local council	Seats	Local council	Seats
Impendle	7	AbaQulusi	44	uMzimkhulu	40
Mkhambathini	14	eDumbe	15	uMhlathuze	60
Mpofana	7	Nongoma	42	Mfolozi	30
Msunduzi	73	Ulundi	47	Mthonjaneni	11
Richmond	14	uPhongolo	27	Nkandla	27
uMngeni	23	Emnambithini	53	Ntambana	16
uMshwathi	26	Imbabazane	25	uMlalazi	52
Ezingoleni	11	Indaka	20	Endumeni	12
Hibiscus	58	Okhahlamba	28	Msinga	37
Umdoni	19	uMtshezi	17	Nquthu	34
Umuziwabantu	19	Greater Kokstad	16	Umvoti	22
Umzumbe	38	Ingwe	22	Hlabisa	16
Vulamehlo	20	Kwa Sani	7	Jozini	40
KwaDukuza	53	Ubuhlebezwe	24	Mtubatuba	38
Mandeni	34	Ndwendwe	37	The Big 5 False Bay	7
Maphumulo	22	Dannhauser	21	uMhlabuyalingana	34
eMadlangeni	7	eThekwini metropolitan	205	Newcastle	61

Source: Independent Electoral Commission

Established literature holds that as the district size increases so does the proportionality of the electoral system which thus has a positive impact on electoral participation (Blais and Aarts, 2006; Jackman, 1987; Gallego et al, 2011;). The district magnitude of the local councils in KZN shown in table 5 above ranges from as small as 7 to as high as 205. EThekweni which has 205 seats is a metropolitan municipality which explains why (comparatively) it has an abnormally high number of seats. None of the other local municipalities have a seat number of over 100. Barwig (2009) also contends that the district size has a significant impact on the party system, since the larger number of available seats increases the incentives for more parties to contest the election.

On the other hand a small district size reduces the chances of smaller parties getting a seat in the council since the threshold of representation tends to be high in such areas. This discourages participation both by the smaller parties and their potential supporters, resulting in reduced turnout. Therefore this study hypothesizes that a larger district size is likely promote inclusiveness and competition between the parties. This may also motivate voters to participate as it increases the chances of their votes making an impact on the outcome of the election. The district size of each local council in the South African local elections is determined by the municipal demarcation board taking into consideration the geographical and the population size of the area.

- b) *Disproportionality (D)*: measures the extent to which a party's percentage of seat shares corresponds to its share of the votes and is one of the basic dimensions of an electoral system. It simply indicates the amount of deviation of a party's seat shares from its vote share. No electoral system is perfectly proportional. It is just that some systems are more disproportional than others. More disproportional systems are characterised by huge gaps between vote shares and seat shares (Taagepera and Grofman, 2003: 660). Disproportionality raises both technical and normative issues.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Samuel and Snyder (2001) argue that the discrepancy between votes and seat distribution has important political and moral ramifications. Firstly it violates the 'one man one vote' principle which is an essential

In South Africa's mixed electoral system the SMD component of the electoral system has the lowest proportionality since the candidate with the highest number of votes takes all regardless of the number votes other candidates have. The PR component of the system is more proportional as the parties' number of seats is determined by the number of votes they get. Therefore parties whose number of votes is above the specified quota are assured of getting at least a seat in parliament. The PR system tries to balance the big-party bias in the way seats are allocated under the single-member constituency system. There are a variety of methods that have been devised by scholars in electoral research to measure disproportionality. The three most widely accepted methods of measurement include Rae (1967)'s average deviations, Loosemore-Hanby (1971)'s index and Gallagher (1991)'s least-squares method. These will be discussed briefly in this section with a view to picking the best method for the present study.

Douglas Rae's index of disproportionality, which is widely regarded as the 'pioneering index', measures proportionality by finding the sum of the absolute differences between the seat percentages ( $s_i$ ) and the vote percentages ( $v_i$ ) for each party and dividing the total by the number of parties participating in the elections ( $n$ ):

$$D = \frac{1}{n} \sum |s_i - v_i|$$

However the Rae index has been criticised for being overly sensitive to the presence of smaller parties (Gallagher, 1991; Lipjhart, 1994; Taagepera and Grofman, 2003). As shown in Table 6 (example B) below the index has a tendency to record deceptively low levels disproportionality of electoral systems with many small parties which receive a handful of votes below the threshold of representation (Lipjhart, 1994). It gives small and large parties the same weight and in the process overlooks huge variations that exist in terms of the number of votes for each party. The index records a disproportionality of 5.00 in the first example but drops significantly to 1.67 in example B even though the situation is still very much similar. A large number of parties with a few votes and without any seats in parliament would bring the level of disproportionality down.

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element of democratic theory. They contend that high levels of disproportionality are ethically unjustifiable and are a symptom of the underlying weaknesses of the electoral system.

The second measure was developed by John Loosemore and Victor Hanby (1971) known as the Loosemore-Hanby index. Like Rae's index the Loosemore-Hanby index adds up the vote-seat share differences for all parties and then divides the total by 2 and not by the number of parties as Rae did.

$$D = \left(\frac{1}{2}\right) \sum |s_i - v_i|$$

Where ( $s_i$ ) is the party seat share, ( $v_i$ ) is the party vote share. While this index effectively solves the weakness of the Rae index of understating disproportionality in systems with many small parties, it is also guilty of going to extreme in the opposite direction. It records higher than actual proportionality levels in systems with many small parties as seen in example B on Table 6.

**Table 8: Hypothetical election results and the three measures of disproportionality**

Example	Number of parties	Votes%	Seats%	Difference %	
A	1	55	60	5	Rae= 5.00
	1	45	40	5	LH= 5.00
					LSq= 5.00
B	1	50	55	5	Rae=1.67
	1	40	45	5	LH= 10.00
	10	1	0	1	LSq= 5.48
C	5	15	16	1	Rae= 1.00
	5	5	4	1	LH= 5.00
					LSq=2.24

Source: Adapted from Arendt Lipjhart (1994: 59). Electoral systems and party systems. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Table 6 above shows the distribution of votes and seats in a hypothetical election result and illustrates how the various measures of disproportionality would fare in different scenarios. The Loosemore-Hanby index was designed mainly to calculate disproportionality in the largest-remainder system like the one used for the local elections in South Africa. Gallagher (1991:40) points out that the main difference between Rae's index and the L-H index is that the former measures disproportionality per *party* whereas the latter measures disproportionality per *election* (emphasis in the original).



The third measure of disproportionality was devised by Michael Gallagher in an attempt to mitigate the weaknesses of the other two measures. He developed the least-squares index (LSq) which tries to find common ground between the Rae and LH indexes. This method squares and adds the vote-seat share differences for each party. The total is then divided by 2 and then finds the square root of this value (Gallagher, 1991:40)

$$LSq = \sqrt{\frac{1}{2} \sum (s_i - v_i)^2}$$

This method weights the deviations by their own values making larger deviations influence the final result more than small deviations (Lipjhart, 1994; Kenoit, 2000). Gallego et al (2012: 161) argue that it is a comprehensive measure of which captures both the psychological and mechanical effects of the electoral system. For more disproportional situations the least-squares index gives a reasonably high value and for more proportional systems it gives a suitably lower value.

The present study adopts *Loosemore-Hanby* index to measure the proportionality of the electoral system in the KZN 2011 local elections. This index, despite its weaknesses, would be more appropriate in the context of South Africa which has a dominant party system and a lot of small parties and is simple to calculate. The index is also more sensitive to changing electoral scenarios as displayed in Table 6 above. This index will be used to calculate disproportionality for both the PR system and the majoritarian system. The study hypothesizes that high degree of disproportionality is likely to have a negative relationship with turnout levels. This is because a high degree of disproportionality indicates a high number of wasted votes and inherent biases in the election system, more often towards bigger parties. The final value of disproportionality will be calculated by finding the difference in the *D* values of the PR and the ward-based systems. Since these systems are designed to complement each other, this difference would reflect the *D* value of the whole system.

- c) *Effective Number of Parties (N)*: One of the most important political consequences of the electoral system is in the way in which it shapes the party system (Mosley and Reynolds, 2002: 4; Lipjhart, 1994). Literature on electoral research is replete with empirical evidence that electoral systems have a direct impact on the party system.

Generally the PR system is associated with multi-party or fragmented systems due mainly to its low threshold of representation making it possible for small parties to participate. The SDM system on the other hand is highly correlated to a two or three-party system similar to the one found in the United States and Britain (Charron, 2011).

Effective number of parties is also one of the best predictors of voter participation in electoral research (Barwig, 2009; Blais, 2000; Chen, 2011; Gallego et al, 2013). This was why the decision was taken to include as one central variables of the present study. According to Laakso and Taagepera (1979: 4), the effective number of parties refers to the number of hypothetical equal size parties that all have the same impact on the fractionalization or fragmentation of the political system as do the actual parties of unequal size. In the established literature it is argued that the higher the effective number of parties, the higher the likelihood of a coalition government (Jackman, 1987; Blais and Aarts, 2006). This is likely to reduce the incentive to turnout because voters may perceive the impact of their vote to be reduced significantly as it is not decisive in the formation of government.

The task of forming a government falls on the parliamentary negotiations that ensue between parties which have the required number of votes. However, this study hypothesizes that in the context of a dominant party system as is the case in South Africa where the ANC is by far the largest party, a larger N is likely to be a boost to electoral participation for the voters. It is also likely to motivate the political parties to step up their voter mobilisation efforts in a bid to improve their chances of gaining representation. In a dominant party system, just making it to the municipal council would be perceived as an achievement by the smaller parties and their supporters who are challenging the dominant party. As such this study will borrow Laakso and Taagepera (1979)'s method of computing the value of N which is calculated by finding the inverse sum of each party's share of votes or seats.

$$N_v = \frac{1}{\sum v_i^2}$$

$$N_s = \frac{1}{\sum s_i^2}$$

Where  $v$  is the percentage of each party's vote or seat share and  $N$  is the effective number of parties. This will be calculated both for the PR system and the ward constituency system. The variable will be divided into effective number of electoral parties and effective number of parliamentary parties. The study hypothesizes that as the value of  $N$  increases electoral participation is also likely to increase, especially in those districts where other parties are able to mount a formidable challenge to the ANC's dominance. The final values of  $N_s$  and  $N_v$  for each electoral district, will be computed by finding the difference between the values of the PR system allocation and the SMD system.

*Competition Index (CI):* To what extent does the mixed system mitigate the electoral dominance and the incidence of party strongholds? This is the question this index intends to address. Competitiveness is also a powerful incentive in driving voter turnout. More competitive elections are likely to motivate people to go and vote since chances are high that their vote may influence the outcome (Riker and Ordeshook, 1968; Feddersen, 2004). Less competitive elections are likely to have the opposite effect. To find the competitive index of each local council election, this study will calculate the difference in vote percentage between the winning party and the party that comes second. It will be calculated thus

$$CI = W_v - HL_v$$

Where  $W_v$  is the winning party's percentage vote share,  $HL_v$  is the highest loser, the party with second highest percentage of vote-share. South Africa is largely a dominant party system with occasional flashes of multi-partyism. The distance therefore between the two highest parties may suffice to gauge the competitiveness of the elections since other parties get insignificant shares of the votes. The larger the difference between the highest two parties, the less competitive an election is, while a narrower difference indicates that the elections were more competitive.

Although electoral systems are meant to provide a level playing field for the competing political parties, they do structure competition in a way that favours one party over another (Lipjhart, 1994). Competitiveness is an important attribute of elections as it gives voters the chance to decide among an array of choices, who will represent their interests in government. The way votes are translated into seats, how ballot papers are structured and how the electoral districts are demarcated will inevitably give some parties an advantage over the other parties (Norris, 2003). Whilst

no electoral system is perfect, some systems do exacerbate the skewedness of the electoral playing field and some are effective in abating and mitigating it and in doing so determine voter turnout levels.

### 5.7 Additional variables

There are many other factors that could help shed light on the impact of the electoral system on voter turnout in the KZN province local elections which this research will use besides the above-mentioned.

*Threshold of representation:* The threshold of representation is the quota system used in the seat calculation process as explained in Chapter 3. It refers to the amount of votes required for a party to gain at least one seat in the local council.

*Socio-economic development:* This variable will include the percentage of people with a grade 12 and an education beyond high school in each local municipality. Statistics South Africa calculated average percentages for each district municipality. It will also include the unemployment rates in each local council as calculated in the 2011 census. Each local municipality will be assigned the average percentage of the district municipality under which it falls.

### 5.8 The methods and techniques

The cross-sectional structure of the data used for this study allows for a quantitative examination of the relationship between the different components of the electoral system and the citizens' likelihood turnout in the elections. This study uses stepwise multivariate regression model to calibrate the effects of different components of the electoral system on participation patterns across the 50 electoral districts. The values variables outlined in the preceding section will be calculated for each electoral district (local municipality in this case) and then regression will be run to see what impact, if any, they have on voter turnout.

### 5.9 Concluding remarks

This chapter has discussed the methodologies and the techniques that will be used for data collection and data analysis to conduct this study. This study used a mixed approach albeit predominantly quantitative. This study relies on the multiple linear regression analysis to measure the impact that the various electoral system variables have on turnout variations. This chapter has also dwelt on the conceptualisation and operationalization of the input and output variables to that were used in this study. The dependent variable is voter turnout which is operationalised as the percentage of the voting age population that turned out to vote in the 2011 elections. The independent variables include district magnitude, disproportionality,

effective number of electoral and parliamentary parties, and the competitive index. The first two are part of the mechanical design of the electoral system and the latter two mechanical effects of the electoral system. These variables do exert varying degrees of psychological effects on the voters' decision to turnout and on the parties' motivation to rally voters to go and cast their votes. Examining how these variables influence the electoral participation dynamics in KZN will improve the existing understanding of how the electoral system shapes turnout in the elections.



## CHAPTER SIX

### RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

#### 6.1 Introductory remarks

The pivotal assumption underpinning this study is that voters and political parties are rational actors whose decisions on whether to participate in the elections or stay away are backed by utility maximisation. Electoral choices, costs and vote-decisiveness are essential components of the utility maximisation equation which ultimately determines whether one decides to turnout or stay away and thus affecting overall turnout (Norris, 2003: 1). The study further asserts that electoral system, being the mechanism through which the elections are conducted, inevitably shapes and structures these components so as to affect the voters' and parties' decision to participate in the elections. Different types of electoral systems affect these components in varying ways and in the process shape the direction and intensity of competition between the parties as they manoeuvre around the rules to maximise electoral support (Blais and Aarts, 2006: 181).

Electoral systems have important political, strategic and systemic consequences for political actors and agents alike (Farrell, 2001: 174). They present opportunities as well as challenges, incentives and disincentives, for political parties and voters who are, as Farrell (2001: 184) aptly puts it, "the political actors actually using the electoral system". Mixed systems, PR systems and majoritarian systems and their respective variants have direct implications on the distribution of political power, representation, and credibility of the election process inter alia. It is therefore plausible to argue that since people vote for a government - and electoral systems having influence over the ultimate composition of government – voters would consider how the electoral system enhances the influence of their vote. The preceding chapters set out to make a case for the role of the electoral system in shaping overall participation in the elections.

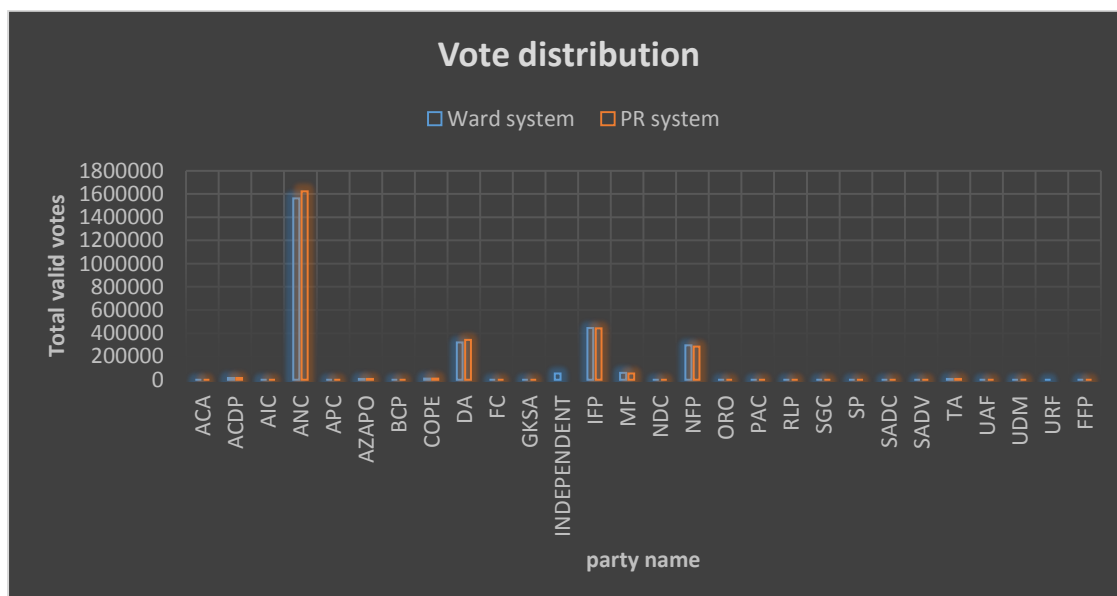
However questions still remain as to the extent and direction of the relationship between the electoral system paraphernalia and overall turnout levels in elections especially in relatively new democracies like South Africa. These are the questions that this study intends to answer in the context of South Africa's 2011 local elections in KZN province. Having said that, this chapter applies the techniques and methods articulated in the previous chapters to measure and show how and to what extent the mixed system affected participation in South Africa's

2011 local elections. Using a stepwise multivariate regression analysis, this chapter will demonstrate the impact (or lack thereof) the various components of the electoral systems as outlined in the methodology section, have on voter turnout dynamics. This study concedes that to expect the South African electorate to consciously consider how the electoral rules will impact on the decisiveness of their vote may be a big request. Especially so, since it assumes that the voters understand how the electoral system operates.

## 6.2 The election results: not a good story for small parties

South Africa employs a mixed electoral system for its local elections in which votes and seats for each party are counted and allocated separately under the FPTP and PR systems respectively. Half of the seats are allocated through the majoritarian system in the ward-based elections and the other half through the PR system (IEC, 2014). The trends or patterns evident in the distribution of votes in the KZN province as displayed in Figure 10 show that the party system can be classified as a dominant to a three-party system. The ANC amassed 55% and 57% of the vote in the ward-based and PR elections respectively. The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and National Freedom Party (NFP) and the Democratic Alliance came distant second, third and fourth with 15% and 10% vote share respectively in both FPTP and PR elections.

**Figure 11: Vote distribution in the 2011 local elections in the KZN province**



Source: IEC website, [www.elections.org.za](http://www.elections.org.za)

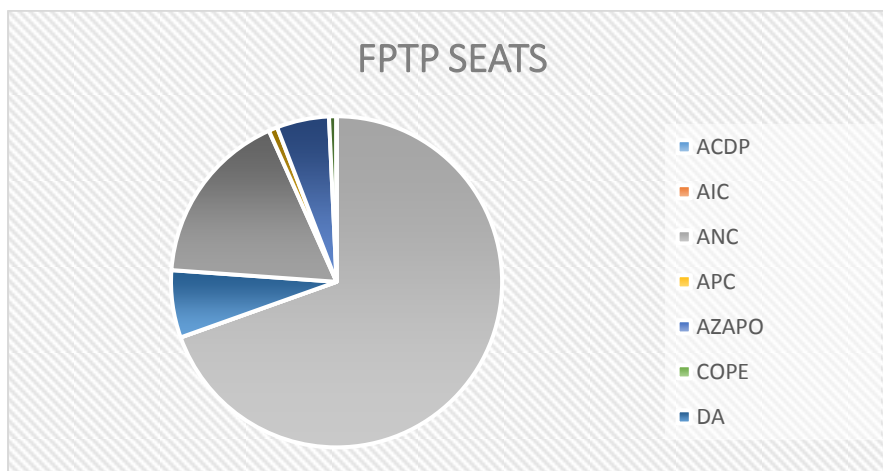
Out of the 27 parties that contested the elections three parties got more than 80% of the votes. Smaller parties with attenuated political capital failed to make significant inroads into the



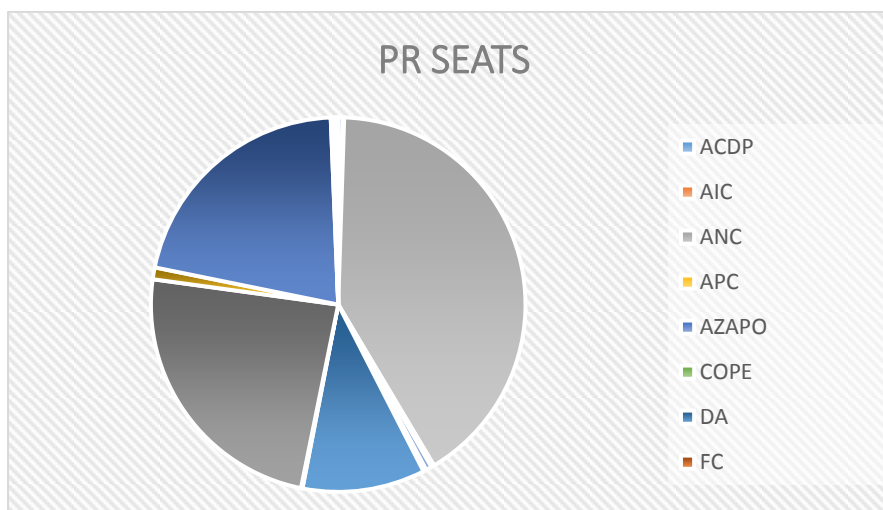
electorate while the bigger parties used their resources to mobilise their supporters to vote. The distribution of votes amongst the political parties is similar in both ward-based elections and PR elections. This is because voters simply vote for the party or candidate of their preference in both ballots as the vote is carried out simultaneously. This also shows that there is no evidence of strategic voting whereby voters have different preferences in the PR and FPTP system.

### Seat distribution: FPTP and PR systems

**Figure 12(a): seat distribution in ward-based elections**



**Figure 12(b): seat distribution in PR elections**



A comparison of the resultant seat distributions of the two electoral formulas paints a contrasting picture from the vote distribution comparison. Whereas vote distribution amongst

parties in ward-based and PR elections is similar, there is a huge difference in the seat distribution under these two systems as displayed in Charts 1 (a) and (b). In the ward-based elections the ANC won a whopping 70% of the seats, the IFP was a distant second, winning only 17% of the seats, the DA and NFP came in at 7% and 5% respectively. Only five parties were able to win seats in the ward-based elections, independent candidates won 6 seats across the entire province.

However, the dynamics changed drastically in the PR elections as indicated in Chart 1(b) above. For more or less the same number of votes, ANC's dominance was reduced significantly as it won only 41% of the seats – a sharp decline from 70% in the ward-based elections. Its closest rivals, the DA, IFP and NFP had a reversal of fortunes winning 11%, 24% and 21% of the seats respectively. Moreover, a total of 16 parties were able to win at least a seat under PR seat allocation system as compared to only 5 in the ward-based elections. Smaller parties like the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), African Independent Congress (AIC) and the Truly Alliance (TA) among others were able to secure at least one seat each. This goes to show how the mechanical features of the electoral system can influence and shape election outcomes. It is as such, not entirely out of place, to predict that, if they can shape outcomes, then they can also potentially shape participation dynamics. That is, they can influence the political parties' and voters' approach to the elections including things as basic, but nevertheless important, as the decision on whether to participate in the elections or not.

### 6.3 Descriptive statistics of the variables: system skewed in favour of the big parties

Tables 9 (a) and (b) show the summary statistics for the various independent variables as they appear for the PR and the FPTP systems. The effective number of elective parties, the effective number of parliamentary parties and disproportionality make for interesting comparisons. The ward-based elections which use the FPTP system have a low effective number of parliamentary parties with a mean of 1.5 while the PR system has a higher value with a mean of 2.26.<sup>32</sup> This means that a vast majority of seats in the ward-based elections were won by a single party, the ANC, thus reinforcing the dominant party system. On the other hand, the PR system fosters a more widespread distribution of seats in the council to different parties though still it was dominated by a few parties. This is consistent with Duverger's Law which states that PR systems foster a multi-party system and majoritarian elections usually result in a two-party system (Benoit, 2006: 70).

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<sup>32</sup> The Laakso-Taagepera index of the effective number of parties.

The comparison on the effective number of elective parties presents a somewhat surprising picture. Under the FPTP system, NE has a mean of 2.42 which is slightly above that under the PR system with a mean of 2.28. This means that under the ward-based system votes are spread to slightly more parties than is the case under the PR system. This may also reflect the influence of independent candidates who can only compete in ward-based elections. The FPTP system is highly disproportional in its vote-seat translation. Disproportionality<sup>33</sup> has a mean of 0.24 under the FPTP system which means that on average 24% of the votes cast in the ward-based elections were not reflected in the outcome. Under the PR system disproportionality levels are quite low, recording a mean of 0.08 meaning that, on average, only 8% of the votes cast were wasted.

**Table 9a: Summary statistics for FPTP system**

	<i>VTO-VAP</i>	<i>NP</i>	<i>NE</i>	<i>D</i>
Mean	0.43	1.53	2.42	0.24
Standard Error	0.007	0.07	0.07	0.02
Median	0.44	1.38	2.37	0.24
Standard Deviation	0.05	0.51	0.51	0.1
Sample Variance	0.002	0.27	0.26	0.012
Range	0.21	1.64	2.5	0.51
Minimum	0.30	1	1.28	0.08
Maximum	0.51	2.64	3.78	0.59
Count	51	51	51	51

VTO-VAP – voter turnout as a percentage of VAP

NP – effective number of parliamentary parties

D – Disproportionality

NE – effective number of elective parties

**Table 9b: Summary statistics for PR system**

	<i>VTO-VAP</i>	<i>NP</i>	<i>NE</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>DS</i>	<i>Threshold</i>
Mean	0.43	2.27	2.29	0.09	32	0.1
Standard Error	0.007	0.07	0.086	0.05	4.14	0.01
Median	0.44	2.26	2.25	0.028	25	0.08
Standard Deviation	0.05	0.5	0.61	0.38	29.53	0.08
Sample Variance	0.002	0.24	0.38	0.14	872.16	0.006
Range	0.21	2.04	3.5	2.75	198	0.37
Minimum	0.30	1.16	0.006	0	7	0.009
Maximum	0.51	3.2	3.5	2.75	205	0.4
Count	51	51	51	51	51	51

<sup>33</sup> Loosemore-Hanby index of disproportionality

DS – district size or magnitude

The actual number of parties contesting the elections in both PR and ward-based elections averaged nearly 7 per constituency with a low of 4 and high of 19. Voter turnout averaged 42 percent with a high of 51% and a low of 30%. However the variation in voter turnout is very low with a standard deviation of 0.04 and a sample variance of 0.002. District magnitude across the electoral districts had an average of 32 with the lowest having only 7 seats and the highest, which was the eThekweni metropolitan municipality, with 205 seats. The threshold which only applies in the PR system recorded an average of 10%. This means that on average parties had to secure at least 10% of the votes in order to gain representation in parliament. This perhaps explains why the effective number of parliamentary parties is low, since many small parties do not have the political muscle to garner 10% of the votes. About a third of the electoral districts had no decisive outcome with any party obtaining an absolute majority of seats. If anything can be read from these statistics, it is that electoral systems have direct if not decisive implications on the structure and nature of competition between parties. Moreover, electoral rules also influence the composition of elected bodies in terms of the number of parties that get representation in parliament.

**Table 10 (a) and (b): correlation coefficients of the variables**

Correlation matrices – FPTP system

	<i>VTO-VAP</i>	<i>Parties</i>	<i>NP</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>NE</i>	<i>CI</i>
VTO-VAP	1					
Parties	-0.39	1				
NP	-0.06	-0.13	1			
D	-0.12	0.15	-0.61	1		
NE	-0.40	0.063	0.57	0.15	1	
CI	0.12	0.24	-0.75	0.12	-0.8	1

Correlation matrices – PR system

	<i>VTO-VAP</i>	<i>DS</i>	<i>NP</i>	<i>NE</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>Threshold%</i>	<i>CI</i>
VTO-VAP	1						
DS	-0.15	1					
NP	-0.32	0.04	1				
NE	-0.35	-0.08	0.74	1			
D	0.05	0.07	0.14	-0.51	1		
Threshold%	-0.12	-0.55	-0.06	0.12	-0.06	1	
CI	0.12	0.08	-0.8	-0.6	-0.14	0.023	1

Tables 10(a) and (b) show the correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variable (voter turnout), under the ward-based and PR systems in the local elections respectively. The tables also show the correlation coefficients between the various independent variables themselves. Under the FPTP system which captures the dynamics of the ward-based elections the effective number of elective parties seems to have a fairly strong negative correlation with voter turnout with a value of 0.4. The other two variables measurable under the FPTP system; effective number of parliamentary parties and disproportionality have weak and negative correlation with voter turnout and have coefficients of 0.06 and 0.12 respectively. Amongst the independent variables the most notable relationship are disproportionality and the effective number of parliamentary parties with a negative correlation coefficient of 0.61. This shows that high levels of disproportionality result in a few parties gaining representation in the council. Disproportionality also has a weak but positive correlation with NE with a coefficient of 0.15. NE and NP are strongly related with a positive correlation coefficient of 0.51.

Table 10(b) captures the dynamics of the relationship between voter turnout and the PR component of the mixed system and its associated variables. The most interesting aspect in the trends shown on the table is that all the independent variables with the exception of disproportionality have negative correlation coefficients with voter turnout. This is a departure from general consensus in the literature which posits that PR systems generally have a positive relationship with turnout (Jackman, 1987; Blais and Dobrynska, 1998). NE shows a comparatively strong relationship with the dependent variable having a correlation of -0.35 while disproportionality is the weakest with a correlation of 0.05. Amongst the independent variables NE and NP exhibit a very strong positive correlation with a value of 0.74. This is likely because under PR system vote shares and seat shares are more proportional than under the FPTP system. It would be prudent to eliminate one of these variables from the model as they seem to measure the same thing. The threshold and DS have a fairly strong correlation coefficient of -0.51. This means that as the number of seats in a local municipality increase the number of votes required for a party to gain at least one seat becomes low since the threshold is a dividend of DS and voter turnout. The opposite is equally true. Disproportionality and NE have a coefficient of -0.52 meaning that disproportionality decreases if more parties gain votes in the elections.

## 6.4 Regression analysis: results and models

South African local elections are conducted by two independent electoral systems simultaneously. Therefore, this study created two multivariate regression models to measure the extent of the causal relationship between the two electoral formulas on the one hand and voter-participation levels on the other. The FPTP system measured the effect of disproportionality, effective number of elective parties and effective number of parliamentary parties on voter turnout in the ward-based elections. The competition index was eliminated to avoid collinearity with NE and also strengthen the model. The PR system model measures the effect of the district magnitude, the threshold of representation, number of elective parties, disproportionality.

### Model 1: Impact of the ward-based system on voter turnout

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.503
R Square	0.25
Adjusted R Square	0.206
Standard Error	0.0420
Observations	51

<i>ANOVA</i>					
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	3	0.028	0.009	5.328	0.003
Residual	47	0.083	0.0017		
Total	50	0.111			

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Intercept	0.478	0.035	13.42	1.09E-17
NP	0.063	0.027	2.34	0.024**
NE	-0.079	0.02	-3.64	0.0006***
D	0.187	0.10	1.75	0.085*

Local municipality turnout =  $0.478 + 0.063(\text{NP}) - 0.079(\text{NE}) + 0.187(\text{D})$

\*\*\* significant at 0.01

\*\* significant at 0.05

\*significant at 0.1

### Model 2: regression results of the PR system and voter turnout

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.46

R Square	0.21
Adjusted R Square	0.15
Standard Error	0.04
Observations	51

#### ANOVA

	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>
Regression	4	0.023	0.006	3.12
Residual	46	0.087	0.002	
Total	50	0.11		

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Intercept	0.53	0.032	16.9	2.31E-21
Threshold	-0.15	0.095	-1.58	0.119
D(p)	-0.02	0.019	-1.06	0.29
NE(p)	-0.033	0.012	-2.75	0.008***
DS	-0.0005	0.00025	-1.96	0.05**

Regression equation:

$$\text{Local municipality turnout} = 0.53 - 0.15(\text{threshold}) - 0.02(D) - 0.03(NE) - 0.0005(DS)$$

Model 1 is fairly strong and shows some interesting trends. The results disconfirm the hypotheses proposed for this study, especially in the case of disproportionality. As the results show, disproportionality is statistically significant at 10% and has a positive incremental effect on turnout. The effective number of elective parties has a negative coefficient and is statistically significant at 0.01 level. The effect of NP is consistent with the hypothesis of this study that the number of parties gaining representation in parliament has a positive effect on turnout though the effect is minimal at 0.063. Having a realistic chance of gaining representation motivates political parties to mobilize their supporters to go and cast their votes in the elections (Perez-Linan, 2001: 290). Moreover, the supporters of smaller parties are also motivated to go and vote as they feel their votes would be reflected in the outcome. These results underscore the effect of the dominant party system in which major parties like the ANC, IFP and NFP are able to mobilize their supporters to go and vote. Perez-Linan investigating the effect of electoral systems on turnout in Latin America found that electoral systems play, at best, a marginal role in turnout variations in the countries in that region (2001: 286).

Model 2 on the PR component of the electoral system shows results broadly out of sync with the hypotheses proposed in this study. All the electoral system variables: NE, D, DS and the

threshold have negative regression coefficients. This is similar to Barwig (2009: 298)'s results on the investigation of the impact of the electoral system in Morocco where all the variables were negative. Two of the variables: district size and effective number of parties are statistically significant. The threshold of representation is marginally significant at the 10% level. The high degree of proportionality in the PR system makes NP and NE almost one and the same thing, hence the former was removed from the model to reduce the risk of multicollinearity. The threshold of representation has the strongest relationship with turnout. As the threshold increases it means smaller parties have slim chances of gaining representation and therefore are not motivated to participate or mobilise their supporters. A higher threshold drastically reduces the viability of smaller parties' candidates. Disproportionality which has a negative coefficient is consistent with the hypothesis of this study but is understandably statistically insignificant since there is little disproportionality in the PR system of vote-seat translation. The model only explains 15% of the variations in turnout observed in the local municipalities in 2011. This is lower than Barwig (2009: 298)'s model of the impact of the electoral system on electoral participation which explained 55% of the variations while Perez-Linan's model in Latin America yielded only 4% (2001: 286).

### 6.5 Result analysis: electoral system-voter turnout relationship

A reading of the results shows that the electoral system has limited albeit non-negligible influence (even if indirectly) on voter turnout dynamics in KZN's 2011 local elections. The mixed electoral system, largely because it directly influences election outcome, shapes the constraints and incentives of the political parties and the voters in participating in the elections on a number of fronts (Norris, 2003: 1-3; Barwig, 2009: 296-299). The simultaneous use of the single-member district system and the multi-member district in the local elections presents the parties with unique challenges and opportunities as they formulate their electoral strategies. Political parties and voters are the principal users of the electoral system. It is therefore inevitable that as the parties devise strategies on how to get the most out of the elections; or weighing if they can get anything at all, the mechanical effects of the electoral system will be a key factor (Blais and Aarts, 2006: 185-186).

A similar case might be made for the voters as well. The electorate votes in the hope that their favoured candidate will be victorious or their party of choice will form the government. Therefore it is most likely that the electoral system is at least one of the important factors as voters weigh the likely impact their vote may have on the outcome of the election. This section explores the potential psychological impact of the electoral system on both the parties



and the voters pertaining to their decisions to participate in the elections. Further, it discusses how these electoral systems determine electoral choices, costs and vote decisiveness and ultimately the level of voter turnout.

#### 6.5.1 The FPTP system effect and rational choice assumptions

An examination of the results reveals, to an important extent, evidence and support of Duverger's law<sup>34</sup>. The FPTP component of the mixed system used in the ward-based elections appears to be biased in favour of the big parties and against the smaller parties. Ladner and Milner (1999: 246) also found majoritarian systems to be negatively correlated with the number of parties that win seats in the Canadian local elections. The ward-based elections had an average of 0.24 for disproportionality and 1.5 for the effective number of parliamentary parties. This means that most of the council seats calculated by the FPTP formula went to a single party with the remaining few seats being shared by other parties. A disproportionality of 0.24 indicates that almost a quarter of the votes (24% or 687 805) of the votes, mostly that of the smaller parties turned out to be wasted votes in the allocation of 50% of the available seats. That is, no seats were awarded for those votes, resulting in these parties being underrepresented in the council. Furthermore, as shown on Table 11 below, in 17 out of the 51 (a third) local municipalities in the KZN province one or the other of the big parties had a clean sweep in the ward-based elections.

**Table 11: distribution of votes in 17 local municipalities in ward-based elections**

Local council	VTO%	D	NP	NE
uMzumbe	44	0.27	1.1	1.83
Emnambithini	39	0.29	1.1	2.29
uMzimkhulu	45	0.08	1.1	1.28
Mpandeni	40	0.28	1.1	2.12
Impendle	47	0.16	1	1.4
Mkhambathini	45	0.39	1	2.37
Mpofana	36	0.3	1	1.94
uMshwathi	47	0.29	1	1.95
Ezinqoleni	46	0.34	1	2.06
Greater Kokstad	45	0.22	1	1.58
Ingwe	47	0.28	1	1.85
Kwa Sani	43	0.36	1	2.14
Ubuhlebezwe	43	0.25	1	1.74
uMhlabuyalingana	44	0.36	1	2.12
Ndwendwe	47	0.34	1	2.1
Dannhauser	40	0.51	1	3.03
eMadlangeni	32	0.59	1	3.78

<sup>34</sup> A hypothesis proposed by Duverger in his work "Political Parties" (1951) stating that electoral systems can significantly shape party systems. Duverger proposed that single-member district majoritarian systems generally result in a two-party system. On the other hand, PR systems tend to promote a multi-party system.

Source: Calculated by the author based on the results of the 2011 local elections recorded on the IEC website, [www.elections.org.za](http://www.elections.org.za).

The effective number of parliamentary parties in these local municipalities for the ward-based elections was 1. Their average disproportionality was 0.31 meaning that 31% of the votes cast by the supporters of other parties, mostly the small parties, were wasted votes. In other words, 31% of the voters were as good as those who had stayed away. In some of the municipalities like Dannhauser and eMadlangeni, over half of the votes (51% and 59% respectively) cast in favour of other parties were not reflected in the allocation of seats. The effective number of elective parties in these municipalities was 3 and 3.78 respectively but all the seats went to a single party.

There are various possible lines of explanation for these trends and various possible implications on the voters' and smaller parties' calculus of participation and mobilization respectively. This significantly reduces the decisiveness of a substantial number of votes which have no influence on the composition of the council. Such prospects may turn away potential voters resulting in lower turnout levels (Chen, 2011: 300). Smaller parties do not invest much effort in canvassing for votes in constituencies they know they don't have any chances of gaining representation. The supporters of the smaller parties themselves would not be motivated to go and cast their votes in the elections since their votes stand a little chance of making a difference (Rainey, 2014:4; Norris, 2003: 4).

Among other things, the electoral system also determines electoral costs associated with the election process incurred both by the voters and the political parties. The demarcation of electoral districts influences the information dissemination and campaign costs to be incurred by parties (Milner, 1997: 91). The electoral costs associated with the FPTP system are prohibitive for chronically under-resourced small parties which can barely afford to carry out effective campaigns in every ward or mount candidates in every ward. For example, campaigning in the ward-based elections may be more expensive for smaller parties as they may not be able to fund the campaigns of their individual candidates (Ladner and Milner, 1999). Such small parties like Federal Congress, South African Democratic Convention (SADC), and African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) among others could only afford to contest in a few districts. This significantly limits the choices available to voters in the elections and may very likely be responsible for depressed turnout rates in the local elections.

Further, it is clear at least from the observation of the results in the ward-based elections that the electoral system in place does affect competition dynamics between parties. For example, as demonstrated by the outcome of the ward-based elections, the use of the FPTP system encourages and reinforces the dominant party system. In such a system one or two parties dominate the political space to the detriment or even outright demise of the other parties. Such a system has the effect of diminishing the amount of realistic choices available to the voters which may explain the high abstention rates observed in the local elections. Turning out to vote and choosing who to vote for are inextricably inter-linked.

In such cases, it is not only the alienated supporters of smaller parties that are not motivated to participate in the elections but even those of the bigger parties themselves. The rational choice theory has it that voters or potential voters are more likely to participate if there is close competition between the party they support and the opposition parties (Riker and Ordeshook, 1968). However, as observed in the results the FPTP system creates a dominant party system in the South African political landscape and as a result weakens competition between the contestants. The supporters of the bigger parties are likely to feel their party or candidate is not in danger of defeat so they will not be pressed to cast their vote thus reducing turnout.

## 6.6 The PR system effect and rational choice assumptions

There is a broader consensus in the mainstream literature that the PR system generally encourages a higher turnout than the majoritarian system (Norris, 2003: 6-9; Ladner and Milner, 1999: 286; Barwig, 2009: 298). The PR system, due to its high degree of proportionality, lower threshold of representation and use of multi-member constituencies promotes multi-party system in which even smaller parties stand a chance of gaining representation. Observation of the results in the KZN 2011 local elections reveals that indeed the PR system is more proportional and more inclusive when it comes to smaller parties.

**Table 12: a comparison of FPTP and PR systems performance in the 2011 local elections**

	<b>FPTP</b>	<b>PR</b>
NE	2.42	2.3
NP	1.5	2.65
D	0.24	0.08

Source: Calculated by the author based on the results of the 2011 local elections

As the information on Table 12 reveals, the PR component of the South Africa's mixed system is more proportional with a disproportionality value of 0.08 compared to the FPTP

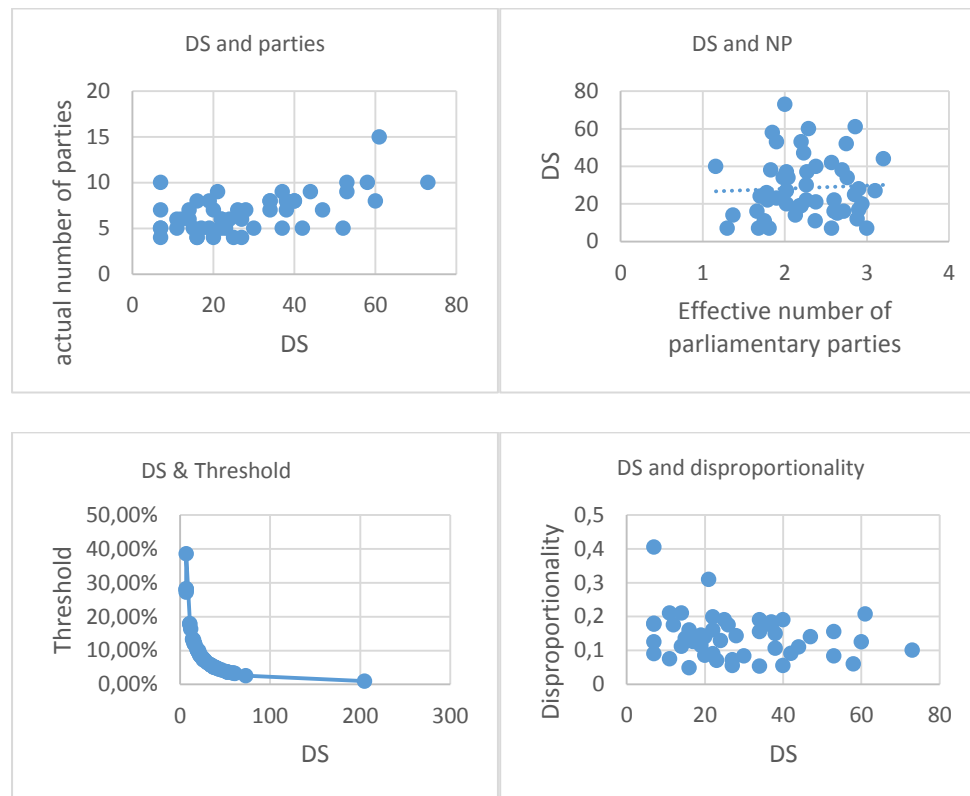
system's 0.24. This means that only 8% of the votes were wasted in PR elections, far lower than 24% of votes wasted in the ward-based elections. Moreover the PR system had more parties getting seats in the local councils as indicated by its value of 2.65 for the effective number of parliamentary parties compared to 1.5 for the FPTP. It is evident from the results that the PR is capable of promoting a multi-party system in the elections. Surprisingly ward-based elections achieved a higher value for the effective number of elective parties at 2.42 than the PR system at 2.3. This is attributable to the campaigns conducted by individual candidates competing for votes in the ward elections, particularly the independent candidates who can only contest in the ward-based elections. It also underscores the huge magnitude of disproportionality in the ward-based elections as shown by a deficit of 0.92 between the NE and NP as compared to that of 0.35 in the PR elections.

However all the elements of the PR system (district size, effective number of parliamentary and elective parties and threshold) examined in this study turned out to be negatively correlated with turnout. This is inconsistent with the consensus in the established literature which holds that these mechanical features of the PR system encourage higher turnout rates in the elections (Ladner and Milner, 1999; Endersby and Kriekhaus, 2008: 605-607; Jackman, 1987: 412). The following section analyses the PR system-voter turnout nexus observed in the 51 local municipalities in the KZN province.

#### 6.6.1 District Size

The use of multi-member districts is perhaps the 'centrepiece' of the PR system. The number of seats available in a constituency determines among other things not only the actual number of parties contesting the elections but also the number of parties capable of winning seats (Duveger, 1956; Jacobs and Spierings, 2010: 705). It also determines the threshold of representation and the degree of proportionality in vote-seat translation (Rainey, 2014: 3).

**Figure 13: scatterplots of district size and other components of the PR system**



As shown on Figure 11, the district size has a positive effect on the number of parties that contest the elections. That is, an increase in district size has the effect of attracting even smaller parties to compete in the elections. Furthermore and related to the preceding point, is the negative relationship between district size and the threshold of representation. An expanding district size has the effect of reducing the number of votes required to get at least a seat in the council (Blais and Aarts, 2006: 188). A low threshold motivates small parties to mobilise their supporters as they become confident of getting a seat in the parliament. DS also has a slightly negative effect on the level of disproportionality as shown in Figure 11. Thus an increase in DS generally results in lower discrepancies between vote-shares and seat-shares which mean fewer votes are wasted. As a result voters may be motivated to vote confident that their votes will count in the allocation of seats.

However the results from the multivariate regression model used in this study indicate that district size had, overall, a negative effect on the voter turnout rates in KZN's 2011 elections. The correlation coefficient between district size and voter turnout is a negative 0.15.

**Figure 14: scatterplots of district and turnout in the 2011 elections**

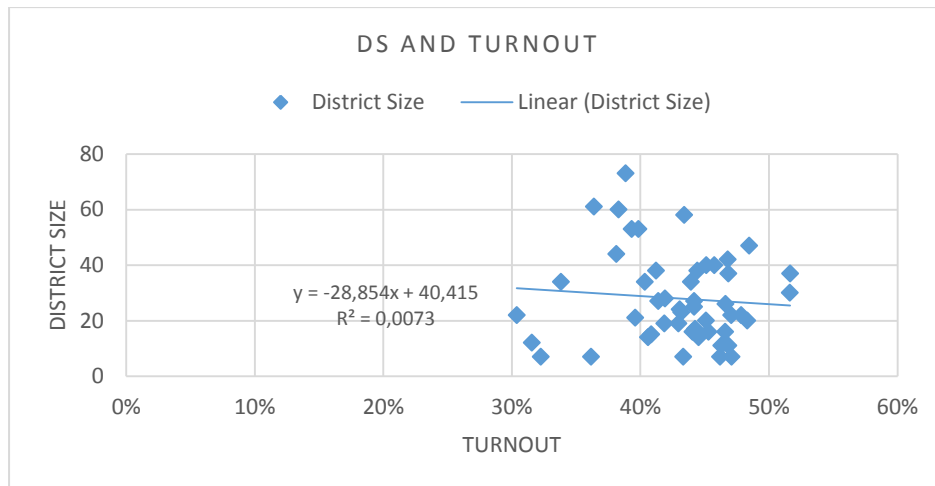


Chart 2 shows the scatterplots of the relationship between district size and turnout in the 2011 local elections. The relationship is generally negative with turnout decreasing as district size increases. This trend disconfirms the hypothesis proposed in this study that district magnitude would have a positive impact on turnout. It is consistent with the findings of Barwig (2009: 298) and Perez-Linan (2001: 286) who found the district magnitude to have a negative impact on turnout in Moroccan and Latin American elections respectively. One possible explanation for this is that the degree of competition amongst political parties is not as intense in larger municipalities as it is in smaller ones. Most of the areas with larger district magnitudes are urban areas like Pietermaritzburg, Durban, Richmond, and Newcastle where mobilising voters may be difficult and expensive. It is fairly easy to mobilise voters in small rural constituencies where big parties can even engage in clientelism. Moreover a larger district magnitude results in a cacophony of political parties which may end up confusing and alienating the voters.

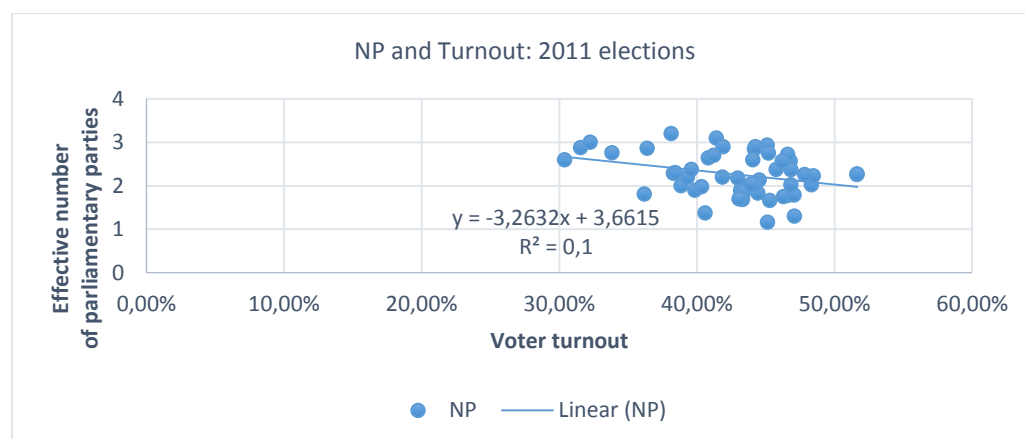
For example, eThekweni, Msunduzi and Newcastle local municipalities had more than ten political parties competing in the elections. This makes it harder for voters, especially the undecided ones, to decide which party to support. It also makes information acquisition and

processing on the contesting parties and candidates more difficult for the voters. The advantages that accompany an expanded district magnitude like a low threshold, a higher number of parties and more proportional vote-seat allocation seemingly failed to translate into increased voter turnout. While a large district magnitude increases the number of (quantity) choices the voters have in terms of political party options, its impact on the quality of those choices is not evident (Barone and de Blasio, 2011). Moreover, these patterns also reflect a poor understanding of the workings of the electoral system by the small political parties and their supporters. A large district magnitude gives them a significant advantage as a higher turnout may substantially alter the outcome in their favour but they apparently did not utilise this advantage.

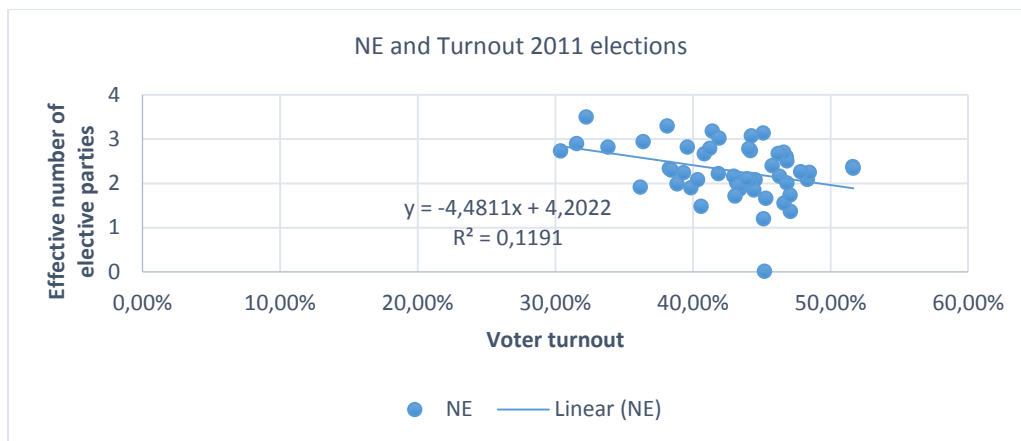
### 6.6.2 Effective number of parliamentary and elective parties

Electoral systems have the potential to influence party systems (Nishikawa and Herron, 2004: 54). The South African party system is largely a dominant party system, where the ANC enjoys a preponderance of support in the electorate (Fauvelle-Aymar, 2008: 142). About 27 political parties contested the KZN 2011 local elections but the effective number of parties both parliamentary and elective is low at 2.5 and 2.3 respectively. Both of these indices are negatively correlated to voter participation as shown on Chart 3 below.

**Chart 3(a): scatterplot of parliamentary parties and turnout**



**Chart 3(b): scatterplot of elective parties and turnout**



Not even the introduction of a reasonably generous proportional system has managed to reduce the dominance of the big parties in the elections. Such a dominant party system where the smaller parties have no political capital to mount a formidable challenge to the bigger parties is a plausible reason for the low turnout witnessed in the elections. It dampens competition. Voters have no motivation to go and vote if they know that their preferred parties do not stand a chance of obtaining representation (Riker and Ordeshook, 1968). Moreover, it may be the case that in districts with low numbers of effective parties the big parties invest a huge amount of resources to mobilise their supporters and use more innovative campaign tactics. Furthermore, a high effective number of parliamentary parties make the vote less decisive in the formation and composition of government. This is because under such circumstances government or council is formed by a coalition of parties making the government ineffective (Jackman, 1987).

### 6.7 Implications for South Africa's democracy

The picture emerging from the results is a particularly worrying one from the perspective of democratic development. Voter apathy is prevalent at the local level as less than half of the voting age population bothers to go and cast votes. Only 42% of the VAP turned in the 2011 local elections in KZN. Any initiative to consolidate and strengthen democracy will not be successful if democracy at a local level is weak. As Barone and de Blasio (2011) aptly put it, the grassroots communities are the “schools of democracy”. Such levels of voter disengagement may be symptomatic of what Czesnik (2006) referred to as a “democratic deficit”. Moreover, the local government in South Africa is an important sphere of government with real powers to make important and far-reaching decisions. It is therefore important for the citizens to participate in the elections that determine the composition and by extension the policies that adopted and pursued by the government.



Such low voter-participation level has negative implications on, among other things, government accountability and legitimacy, representativeness of elected institutions, the quality of democracy and its development going forward. As Herzenberg (2011) puts it “turnout has the potential to unleash new electoral trends in South African politics”. While the institutional setting is only one in a legion of factors that determine voter turnout rates, it is without doubt an important one. This study has shown that the electoral system can determine the outcome of the elections, the nature of the party system, competition and the scope of choices available to the voters. And in doing so, it can considerably influence the level of participation in the elections. More so, among other factors that may be linked to voter-participation levels like political culture, social demographics, history and socio-economic development, electoral institutions are the most malleable (Nkiwane, 2008: 2). This means that they can be easily manipulated to make elections more competitive, to expand choices available to the voters, and also to make their votes more decisive and therefore offer a more practical solution to low turnout levels.

At present, the electoral system in the local elections is skewed in favour of the big parties like the ANC, the DA, IFP and ANC. Thus, it promotes a dominant party system and this may lead to government ineffectiveness since the dominant parties are electorally secure regardless of their performance in government. It is also not entirely out of place to claim that the frequent violent protests observed in the local municipalities across the country may be linked to the unthreatened dominance big parties enjoy in the elections. While this may be good politics for the large parties, it stifles the political space and in the long run significantly undermines democracy. Democracy is more effective when the political playing field is level and a vibrant opposition exists. The electoral system can be restructured in such a way as to promote smaller parties, to make government inclusive and more representative.

## 6.8 Concluding remarks

The impact of electoral rules on the level of voter turnout in the KZN 2011 local elections is, broadly speaking, marginal but non-negligible all the same. The FPTP and PR ordinary least squares regression models have r-squares of 0.25 and 0.21 respectively. There is overwhelming evidence that the electoral system does shape the party system and consequently, the competition dynamics. Moreover, the electoral system also influences the outcome of the elections through the vote-seat allocation methods. As such, while evidence of a direct link between the electoral system and electoral turnout is weak, the electoral system has a significant indirect impact on voter-participation rates. The mechanical features

of the electoral system affect the scope of choice available to the voters and also the decisiveness of their votes. For this reason, the electoral rules may have an important psychological effect on the parties and voters' decision to participate in the elections or stay away.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 7.1 Introductory remarks

Voter-participation in South Africa's local elections is extremely low and should be a cause for concern in a young democracy like South Africa which is seeking to consolidate a democratic culture. While this disengagement from the local elections may be isolated, it may be symptomatic of a general problem within the country's democratic set up and may indicate a general attitude of the populace towards political processes and institutions. This study set out to investigate the role of the electoral system in the voter-participation patterns observed in the 2011 local elections. The level of electoral participation relays a great deal about the credibility of the electoral process and the quality of democracy in general. A low turnout does not augur well for continued democratic development. For this reason, it is important that measures are put in place to remedy voter apathy in the local elections. This chapter proposes a compendium of recommendations based on the results of the study as to how voter participation can be improved from the electoral system perspective. The electoral rules, as this study has demonstrated, have tremendous potential to increase the participation levels, if crafted carefully.

#### 7.2 No straight-forward relationship between electoral system and voter participation

The model produced in this study indicates that the relationship between the electoral system and electoral turnout variations is not a straight-forward one. The mechanical effects of the electoral system determine the level of competition, the threshold of representation, the number of parties that compete and more importantly the outcome of the election. The different components of the electoral system have varying degrees of influence over the variations in voter turnout across the local municipalities. Of the two electoral systems used in the local elections in South Africa, the FPTP system appears to affect turnout variations more than the PR system. Surprisingly, disproportionality under the FPTP system not only has a positive coefficient but also has the most powerful effect on voter turnout.

This was inconsistent with the predictions of the mainstream literature which has found that disproportionality is likely to depress turnout. This may be a result of, among other things, innovative and effective campaign tactics by the bigger parties which are able to get their voters to turnout. Large parties are motivated to campaign hard in the ward-based elections since they can only secure a seat by obtaining the highest number of votes. The PR system

has, overall seemed to have a depressing effect on turnout as all the variables affiliated with it have negative coefficients. The most powerful variable is the threshold of representation whose effect is consistent with the hypothesis of this study. That is, voter turnout will decrease if the minimum number of required votes to get at least one seat increases. This demonstrates that smaller parties are not motivated to participate in areas that are likely to yield a higher threshold thus effectively eliminating them out of competition. If this is anything to go by, it shows that the electoral system might have psychological effects on the voters' and parties' calculus of participation.

### 7.3 Rational choice – Institutional paradigm

The rational choice-institutionalist paradigm is a merger of the rational choice and the institutionalist frameworks. It predicted that the electoral system would shape the incentives and the constraints in a way that would affect the propensity of the voters and political parties' participation in the elections and thus affect overall turnout (Barwig, 2009). The electoral system structure (since it has a significant influence on the outcome in terms of seat distribution) and the resultant party system would influence the instrumentality of the vote. This would then affect the voters' psychological predisposition to participate in the elections. Moreover, the electoral system structures electoral competition in a way that determines the scope of electoral choice and the extent of decisiveness of the voters' votes (Norris, 2003; Blais and Aarts, 2006)). The result is that the probability that the voters may be able to influence the outcome.

Looking at the overall participation patterns emerging in the 2011 local elections in KZN, the rational-choice institutionalist framework successfully explains the low turnout levels. The electoral system, especially the FPTP system and those PR districts with a low district magnitude, largely reinforces a dominant party system. For example, the ANC alone won 70% of the seats in the ward-based elections and in the PR elections four parties out of a total of 27 won more than 90% of the seats. Such a dominant party system stifles electoral competition, undermines electoral choice and drastically reduces the instrumentality of the vote for a sizable proportion of potential voters hence the low turnout levels overall. Under such circumstances, the low turnout is not only coming from disenchanted voters of smaller parties, but also a substantial number of big party supporters who may not be motivated to turnout as they may feel their preferred candidate is not in danger of defeat.

Additionally, the high level of disproportionality in the ward-based elections where almost 25% of the votes were not reflected in the distribution seats might also discourage most

voters and political parties. This also applies (albeit to a lesser extent) to low district size and high threshold districts in the PR system. In such a situation it is rational for small parties and their supporters to stay away as their vote will not be able to achieve the desired outcome, which is gaining representation in the government. However, Stein et al (2005: 2) note that in the final analysis, the effectiveness of the electoral system in fostering an increase in voter turnout will depend on the strategic decisions of the political parties. Vote-maximising parties and candidates will exploit the incentives of the electoral system if an increased turnout supports their cause.

#### 7.4 Recommendations: possible remedies to voter apathy

This study has important theoretical implications for the study of voter turnout and electoral institutions and also practical implications for the electoral engineers and policymakers. The results of this study suggest that the electoral system is an important determinant of voter-participation levels. The low levels of participation in the local elections can be reversed if appropriate corrective measures are adopted.

##### 7.4.1 Voter education

There is no doubt that the electoral system structure shaped the incentives and disincentives for voters and parties to participate in the elections. The results of the study indicate that small parties and their supporters did not take full advantage of the PR system that gave them an advantage. Even in constituencies with a low threshold of representation, an increase in turnout which could have altered the outcome significantly in favour smaller parties remained low. This indicates the voters' lack of knowledge (and to some extent the parties as well) of the workings of the electoral system. Gallego et al (2012: 160-161) in their learning model, point out that the effects of new systems may take time to affect the behaviour of the voters and the political parties as they are still getting acquainted with the workings of the electoral system.

Voters and parties can only respond to the incentives of the electoral system after repeated interaction and experience with it. While this is true, this process can always be fast-tracked through an intensive awareness and voter education campaign. This demonstrates the need for the IEC to embark on a programme to educate the voters and the parties about how the electoral system really works and what the implications are. This involves explaining to the voters how the electoral system influences the outcome of the elections and why it is important to go and vote in order to determine the outcome. The voters and the parties can only take advantage of the electoral system if they understand how exactly it influences the

outcome of the elections. The 2011 elections were only the third elections under the current electoral system and it is possible that the parties and the voters alike did not fully comprehend the implications of the system, hence the weak link between electoral rules and voter behaviour.

#### 7.4.2 Hold local and national elections concurrently

A possible solution to the low participation levels in the local elections may be holding the local and national elections simultaneously. National elections always attract a media hype which in turn generates interest from the public resulting in a higher turnout. Geys (2006: 652) argues that concurrent elections increase the general awareness and information level of the voters. Therefore, holding the local and national elections simultaneously may lead to a significant improvement in terms of participation in the former. It does not only increase participation rates but may also reduce the administrative and logistical costs incurred in running separate national and local elections. Therefore, as Hajnal (2003: 656) puts “the cost-cutting effect of concurrent elections makes it even more attractive as a policy lever”. This would significantly increase not only the turnout but attention and interest in the local elections, thus fostering more accountability and legitimacy on the part of the council officials.

#### 7.4.3 An open-list and a lower predetermined threshold for PR elections

The current electoral system does not do enough to offer alternative choices to the voters. It falls far short of accommodating the diverse preferences of the voters by limiting the choices available and this has the effect of depressing turnout. The proportion of seats allocated through the PR system should be reviewed upwards to maybe 80% to ensure that local councils are more representative. This makes the playing field more level and also goes a long way in limiting the dominance of the large parties. A shift to an open-list system would also add an important incentive for the voters and the politicians and therefore improve turnout. An open list means that voters have more choice in determining who governs or is elected to the government by ranking the names on the list in the order of their preference (Blais and Aarts, 2006: 192). An open list also encourages politicians to campaign effectively in their constituencies since their chances of making it to the council depends directly on the amount of votes they get. There would not be enough security for candidates on top of the list who are almost assured they would be elected by virtue of their positions on the party list. Furthermore, the threshold of representation must be predetermined to accommodate and motivate smaller parties and their supporters. For example, the threshold can be set at the 5%

level rather than being left to be determined by the number of voters of who turnout in the elections.

#### 7.4.4 Compulsory voting

Creating a voter-friendly electoral system can be effective as a strategy of boosting voter turnout in the elections but it has its limits. Waiting for the voters to acquaint themselves with the electoral system may slow down or even derail the development of democracy. Therefore there is need to complement the electoral system with other strategies that may be effective in boosting turnout. One of the possible policy options is to institute compulsory voting. Compulsory voting is a law that requires citizens to participate in the elections and is in use in more than 32 countries around the world (Quenteliet al, 2011: 397). Jackson (1987); Lipjhart (1997) and Norris (2003) point out that compulsory voting invariably increases voter turnout wherever it is adopted. Geys (2006: 653) argues that the compulsory voting increases the costs of non-voting for the citizens because of the implications of disobeying the law and for that reason would significantly boost turnout. Bechtel et al (2013: 1) argue that compulsory voting addresses representational inequalities as people who had been previously underrepresented in government can now be represented. Compulsory voting also has the potential of addressing the systemic biases and imbalances inherent in the electoral system. For these reasons, it may be a panacea to the low turnout rates in South Africa's local elections.

#### 7.5 Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

The results of this study show that the electoral system does influence voting behaviour during elections. The study maintains that a potential voter's probability of turning is determined to an important extent, and by no means exclusively, by the institutional context. More specifically, this demonstrates how voters react to the incentives and constraints presented by the institutional context. This study has endeavoured to show how, quantitatively, the electoral system can be a powerful determinant of voter turnout or voting behaviour in general. Using an OLS regression analysis, the study measured the impact of such features of the electoral system like district size, ballot structure, threshold, disproportionality and the effective number of parties. However, the link between electoral behaviour and the structure of the electoral system remains unclear. The model was not very strong, even though most of the variables were significant. If viewed in the context of a relatively new democracy like South Africa, it does shed some useful light into interaction of the electoral institutions and electoral behaviour. The 2011 election was only the third under

the current electoral system. As such, a significant segment of the electorate, especially the young voters may be yet to come to full terms with how the electoral system can influence the power of their vote. Hence their voting patterns may not reflect or be consistent with the constraints or incentives of the electoral system.

Moreover, while the study has made some valuable findings regarding the electoral system-turnout nexus, it nonetheless, remains limited in important ways. Firstly, this study was an aggregate-level inquiry based on aggregate level data measuring systemic level dynamics. The study simply measured the impact of the electoral system from the secondary data provided by the IEC. Any claims about how these dynamics affect the behaviour of the parties and the voters were simply insinuations not supported by empirical data. Thus, the study remains vulnerable to the charge of ecological fallacy. The analysis may fall short of comprehensively and convincingly capturing the dynamics of the interaction between the voters and the electoral system.

A multi-level approach to the study of electoral system's impact on voting behaviour may be more effective. As van Egmond et al (1998:282) point out "a synthesis of individual and aggregate level data places individual characteristics within the boundaries of the political context giving additional insight into the effect of systemic and aggregate level variables on individual attitudes". This being the case, it is advisable that future research on this topic conducts interviews of politicians, parties and voters to ascertain and understand how parties and voters understand the electoral system. This can make the model more robust and more reflective of the South African context. Moreover, voter turnout is affected by many other factors other than the electoral system and is better analysed holistically. The electoral system does not exist in a vacuum. Instead it is embedded in a wider social, political and cultural environment.

An investigation of the impact of the electoral system which overlooks this wider environment can only offer a partial account of the interaction between electoral systems and electoral behaviour. For example, educated and uneducated, young and old, unemployed and employed workers voters may respond, and often do respond, in different ways to the advantages and disadvantages of the electoral system. As such, there is need to include other variables like population demographics, political attitudes and the level of socio-economic development in a model of voter turnout. This may help to isolate the impact of the electoral system on voter participation by measuring the extent to which other factors affect the



variations in voter turnout. Furthermore, future studies would do better by investigating the topic in more than one province and for multiple election cycles and also for different election orders like national, provincial and local elections.

This not only makes the model more robust but it also makes it highly generalizable. The predictive value of the model improves (Ladner and Milner, 1999: 237). Theoretically, this study is fraught with some pitfalls as well. It assumes that the electorate is a homogenous mass whose responses to the institutional context are invariable. It also gives the impression that voters are always rational and instrumental about how, when and whether they will vote. This may be misleading. Nonetheless, the basic tenets of the rational choice model still hold. Granted, not all voters are rational or instrumental. It is equally true that not all voters are irrational and uncalculating. Voters are better off staying at home if they perceive that voting will not achieve the desired outcome of having their preferences reflected in the election results.

**Table showing data for the local municipalities in PR and Ward-based elections**

		Ward-based elections			PR elections				
<b>LOCAL MUNICIPALITY</b>	<b>VTO-VAP</b>	<b>NE</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>NP</b>	<b>NE</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>NP</b>	<b>DS</b>	<b>Threshold</b>
Impendle	47%	1.40	0.16	1	1.36	0.09	1.3	7	28%
Mkhambathini	45%	2.37	0.39	1	2.077	0.03	2.13	14	13%
Mpofana	36%	1.94	0.3	1	1.914	0.055	1.81	7	28%
Msunduzi	39%	2.3	0.18	1.6	1.984	0.02	2	73	3%
Richmond	41%	1.9	0.16	1.32	1.482	0.064	1.37	14	13%
uMngeni	43%	2.26	0.12	1.8	2.02	0.02	1.9	23	8%
uMshwathi	47%	1.95	0.29	1	1.55	0.06	1.78	26	7%
Ezinqoleni	46%	2.06	0.34	1	2.16	0.08	1.75	11	18%
Hibiscus	43%	1.89	0.1	1.6	1.87	0.02	1.85	58	3%
Umdoni	42%	2.2	0.2	1.5	2.22	0.03	2.2	19	10%
Umuziwabantu	43%	2.19	0.26	1.2	2.16	0.03	2.18	19	10%
uMzumbe	44%	1.83	0.27	1.1	1.85	0.03	1.83	38	5%
Vulamehlo	48%	2.1	0.27	1.2	2.09	0.01	2.02	20	10%
AbaQulusi	38%	3.3	0.2	2.3	3.3	0.02	3.2	44	4%
eDumbe	41%	2.67	0.23	1.6	2.67	0.04	2.64	15	13%
Nongoma	47%	2.62	0.17	1.9	2.6	0.011	2.57	42	5%
Ulundi	48%	2.24	0.28	1.28	2.25	0	2.23	47	4%
uPhongolo	41%	3.2	0.1	2.64	3.18	0.01	3.1	27	7%
Emnambithini	39%	2.29	0.29	1.1	2.24	0.02	2.2	53	4%
Imbabazane	44%	2.7	0.35	1.37	2.74	0.03	2.85	25	8%
Indaka	45%	3.20	0.14	2.63	3.14	0.03	2.94	20	10%
Okhahlamba	42%	3.06	0.26	1.78	3.02	0.026	2.9	28	7%
uMtshezi	44%	3.09	0.21	1.97	3.07	0.042	2.9	17	12%
Greater Kokstad	45%	1.58	0.22	1	1.66	0.04	1.66	16	12%
Ingwe	47%	1.85	0.28	1	1.73	0.04	1.79	22	9%
Kwa Sani	43%	2.14	0.36	1	1.94	0	1.68	7	27%
Ubuhlebezwe	43%	1.74	0.25	1	1.71	0.008	1.7	24	8%
uMzimkhulu	45%	1.28	0.08	1.1	1.2	0.03	1.16	40	5%
uMhlathuze	38%	2.59	0.24	1.63	2.33	0.01	2.29	60	3%
Mfolozi	52%	2.45	0.14	1.8	2.38	0.026	2.26	30	6%
Mthonjaneni	47%	2.5	0.12	2	2.51	0.03	2.37	11	18%
Nkandla	44%	2.50	0.13	1.96	2.09	0.014	2.02	27	7%
Ntambanana	47%	2.9	0.09	2.46	2.702	0.007	2.72	16	12%
uMlalazi	32%	2.8	0.12	2.25	0.006	2.75	2.75	52	4%
Endumeni	52%	2.9	0.3	1.38	2.9	0.05	2.88	12	16%
Msinga	34%	2.35	0.33	1.2	2.34	0.018	2.27	37	5%
Nquthu	30%	2.9	0.08	2.47	2.82	0.027	2.76	34	6%
Umvoti	44%	2.75	0.16	1.98	2.73	0.02	2.6	22	9%
Hlabisa	46%	2.51	0.29	1.68	2.78	0.03	2.6	16	12%

Jozini	41%	2.40	0.3	2.63	2.4	0.08	2.38	40	5%
Mtubatuba	46%	2.8	0.19	1.99	2.79	0.023	2.7	38	5%
The Big 5 False Bay	44%	2.7	0.16	2	2.675	0.02	2.57	7	28%
uMhlabuyalingana	40%	2.12	0.36	1	2.1	0.02	2.04	34	6%
KwaDukuza	40%	2.09	0.15	1.45	1.901	0.016	1.9	53	4%
Mpandeni	48%	2.12	0.28	1.1	2.08	0.03	1.98	34	6%
Maphumulo	47%	2.27	0.37	1.19	2.26	0.027	2.26	22	9%
Ndwendwe	40%	2.1	0.34	1	2.011	0.028	2.02	37	5%
Dannhauser	32%	3.03	0.51	1	2.82	0.11	2.38	21	10%
eMadlangeni	36%	3.78	0.59	1	3.5	0.22	3	7	39%
Newcastle	38%	3.08	0.38	1.21	2.94	0.034	2.86	61	3%
eThekwini metropolitan		2.44	0.16	1.65	2.3	0.011	2.3	205	1%

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