

Spatio-demographic dynamics of electoral participation in South Africa

The goal of this edition of *Spatial Insights* is to examine the interplay between spatio-demographic factors, voter registration trends, and electoral engagement in South Africa.

On 29 May 2024, South Africans will head to the polls to choose the leadership for the seventh administration from a pool of 70 political parties and 11 independent candidates, as finalized by the IEC for this election (South African Government News Agency, 2024). Every five years, national and provincial elections take place, open to all citizens of South Africa aged 18 years and older. The Constitution assigns oversight of all elections and referendums across all levels of government to the IEC, established according to the IEC Act of 1996 (Act 51 of 1996) [South African Government, 2024]. To provide ample opportunity for South Africans to reach the polling stations and cast their votes, a special public holiday has been declared. The government urges all eligible voters, particularly young individuals, to turn out in large numbers on that day. The active engagement of every eligible voter is vital in bolstering our democracy (Mahlangu, 2024). In terms of voter registration uptake, Gauteng recorded the lowest rate at 59%, followed by the Western Cape at 61%. Conversely, the Eastern Cape exhibited the highest voter registration uptake, reaching 74% (Census 2022; IEC 2024).

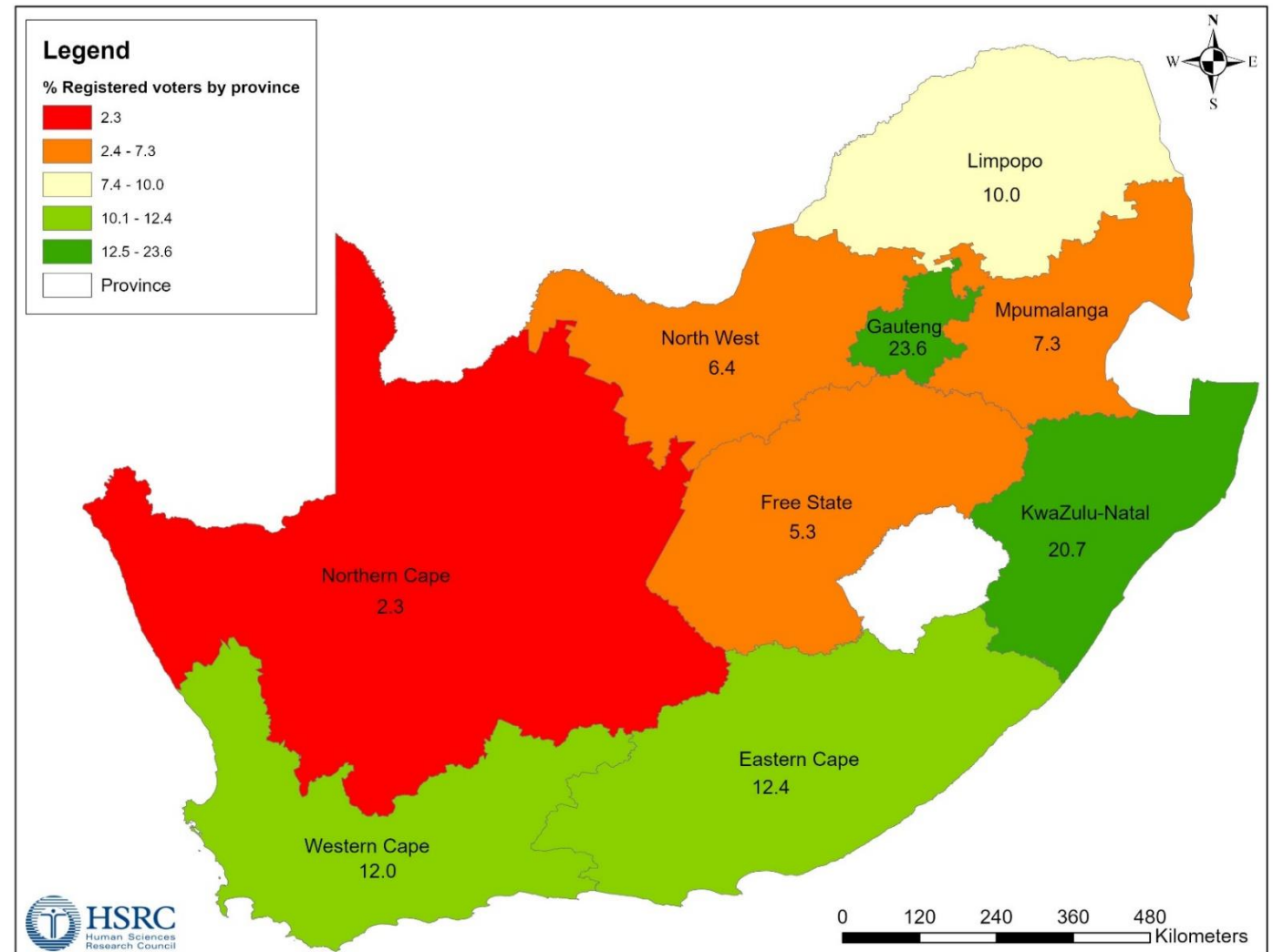
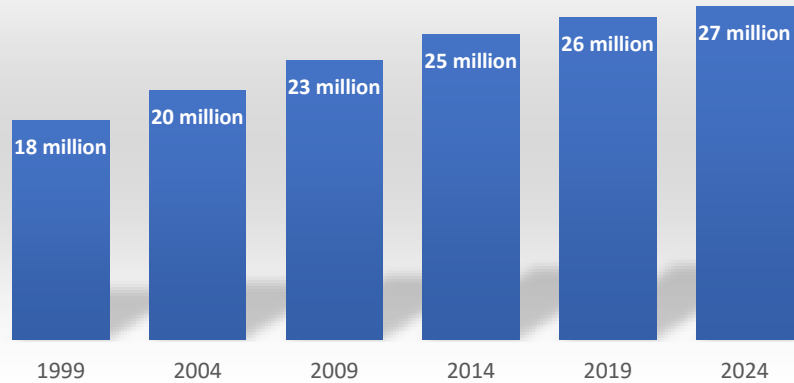


Figure 1: Percentage of registered voters by province

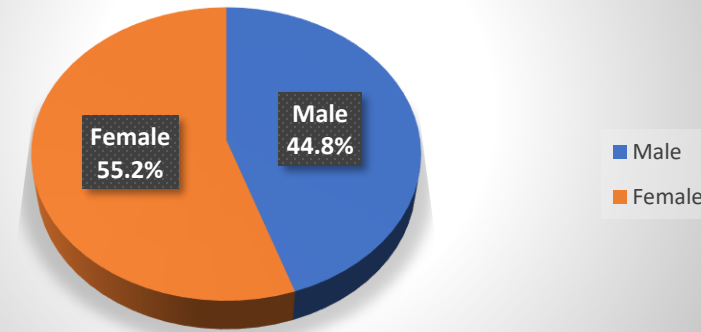
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Registered population

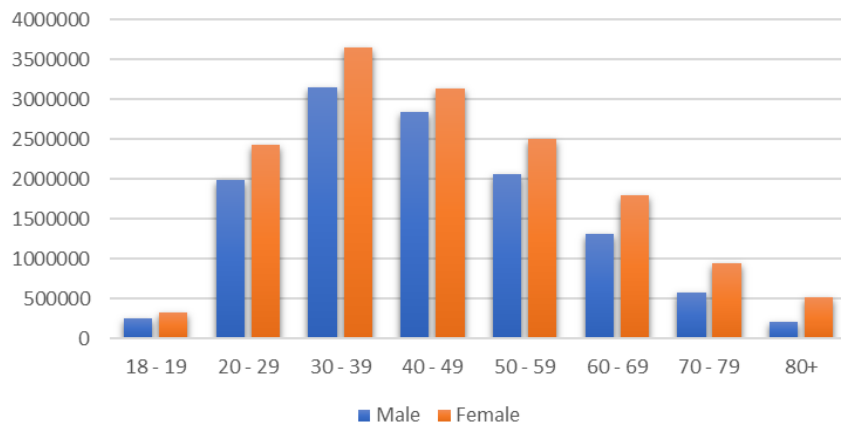


Percentage of registered voters by gender



The top two most densely populated provinces in South Africa, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, collectively represent 44.3% of the entire pool of potential voters for the 2024 elections (Figure 1). Following closely are the Eastern and Western Cape provinces. When observing the number of people registered to vote in South Africa from 1999 to 2024 (Figure 2a), one can observe a consistent upward trend in voter registration over the years. This trend indicates a growing level of engagement and participation in the democratic process over the years. It suggests an increasing interest and involvement of the population in matters of governance and decision-making. Overall, females constituted more than half (55.2%) of registered voters compared to 44.8% of males (Figure 2b). More women have enrolled for voting than their counterparts across all age groups (Figure 2c). The largest number of voters fall within the age brackets of 30 to 39 years (24.6%) and 40 to 49 years (21.6%). Young voters aged 18 to 39 years represent 42.6% of the total registered voters across the country.

Voter registration by age group



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Figure 2: (a) registered population from 1999 – 2024, (b) percentage of registered voters by gender and (c) voter registration by age group.