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## **Social grants and voting in South Africa**

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# Social grants and voting in South Africa

## Abstract

*Social grants are paid monthly for about one in three South Africans. This paper examines both the positive and negative effects of social grants on voters' support for the incumbent party in South Africa. I examine the relationships between receiving a grant, attitudes towards grants, evaluation of the performance of the government, identification with the incumbent party, and voting intention, using countrywide data from 2018. Whilst there is variation in attitudes towards grants, these are not correlated with whether the household receives a grant or not. Bivariate analysis suggests that both receiving a grant and attitudes to grants inform intention to vote for the incumbent party. Part of the bivariate relationship between receipt of a grant and voting for the incumbent party might be due to a positive effect of grant receipt on turnout. A more complete, multivariate model suggests, however, that there is no relationship between either grant receipt or attitudes towards grants, and voting intention, when controls are included for assessments of government performance generally, partisan identification and demographic factors. The paper corroborates and extends the findings from previous studies in South Africa that grants are not a major contributor to voting intention: Receipt of a grant does not seem to increase the likelihood of voting for the incumbent party, and a critical attitude towards grants does not seem to reduce the likelihood of voting for the incumbent party. Grants might be paid to many South Africans, but they do not seem as important as enduring loyalties to the incumbent party or assessments of its overall performance.*

## 1. Introduction

South Africa's social grants – i.e. 'non-contributory' or tax-financed social assistance – have exceptional reach in terms of the proportion of individuals and households that receive them. Whilst means-tested rather than universal, the means-test serves to exclude the rich rather than limit grants to the very poor. Every month almost eighteen million grants are paid out, including (as of December 2018) more than 12.4 million Child Support Grants (CSGs) for

children up to the age of eighteen, more than 3.5 million Old Age Grants (OAGs) to men and women from the age of sixty, more than one million Disability Grants (DGs) to adults assessed as disabled by medical doctors, and a small number of other grants (South Africa, 2019). Grants are thus paid for one in three South Africans. More than half of the population live in households that include at least one person who receives a grant. The cost is considerable. More than 3 percent of GDP is redistributed from rich taxpayers to non-rich individuals.

In some other parts of the world the expansion of social assistance has been fueled by the expectation among political parties that introducing or expanding social assistance wins votes in elections. In Brazil, for example, competition between centre-left and left-wing parties propelled the expansion of the programmes that became Bolsa Família (Melo, 2008; Coêlho, 2012). Garay (2017) found that electoral competition for the votes of ‘outsiders’ was an important (but not the only) factor pushing incumbents to expand social assistance programmes, and this effect was evident for right-wing incumbents (as in Mexico and Chile) as well as for left-wing ones (as in Brazil) (see also Fairfield and Garay, 2017). In India, the long-dominant Congress Party responded to the rising challenge posed by the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 2000s by promising a series of national welfare reforms, whilst political competition also fueled reforms at the state level (Yadav, 2004; Jenkins and Manor, 2017). In Korea, welfare policy was ‘a major policy agenda in every presidential and congressional election’ from 1987 onwards (Kim, 2006: 76).

There is, however, no scholarly consensus over whether or not the expansion of social assistance has indeed yielded electoral dividends for incumbents. Much of the existing evidence comes from Brazil, where the expansion of support for the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT, Worker’s Party) among poor voters in the north-east of the country between 2002 and 2006 was initially attributed to the expansion of Bolsa Família under President Lula of the PT (e.g. Hunter and Power, 2007). In a 2011 article, Bohn challenged this interpretation. Using survey data, she argued that not only did receipt of a Bolsa Família have no effect of voting, but those recipients who did support the PT in the early 2000s were already supporting the party before Lula was elected president in 2002. Bohn does suggest, however, that the PT’s other social policies might have contributed to its expanding support (Bohn, 2011). Zucco and Power (2013) replied, questioning the quality of Bohn’s data on voting in 2002 (and earlier), which were collected five or more years after the election. Using a different dataset on voting in 2006, Zucco and Power found that receiving Bolsa Família had a significant and large effect on voting for the PT. In a thorough analysis using both election results and survey data, Zucco (2013) found that incumbents’ shares of the votes rose following the expansion of social grants, to

the benefit of the PT in 2006 and 2010 but the previous governing party in 2002. Zucco suggested, however, that the effect might be short-lived. Positive effects of grants on voting were identified also in studies of Mexico, where grants generated substantial voter support for incumbents (Diaz-Cayeros, Estévez, and Magaloni, 2016) and Uruguay (Manacorda, Miguel and Vigorito, 2011).

Several studies suggest that Latin American incumbents benefitted in part because turnout rose among voters who hitherto might be considered as political ‘outsiders’ (see also Garay, 2017). De la O (2013) found that social grants increased both turnout and the incumbent’s vote share in Mexico. Layton and Smith (2015) analysed data from across Latin America (from 2012) to assess whether the receipt of a grant in a respondent’s household (not the respondent individually) affected how he/she said that he/she would vote if a presidential election was to be held. They found that receipt of a grant increased the probabilities of, first, voting at all (i.e. turnout) and, secondly, voting for the incumbent – regardless of presidential ideology or the conditions attached to grants. Corrêa and Cheibub (2016) found that, for a set of countries, the mobilizing effect (i.e. raising turnout) was more powerful over time than any conversion effect (i.e. converting opposition voters into incumbent voters).

The debate over the electoral benefits of social assistance becomes further complicated when it is recognized that redistributive social protection entails losers as well as winners, whether economically (through taxation) or ideologically (insofar as some people might be ideologically opposed) (Corrêa, 2015). Non-recipients might react negatively even if recipients react positively, so that the net effect on voting might be very different to the (gross) effect measured in the studies discussed above. Using data on 84 presidential elections across Latin America between 1990 and 2010, Corrêa found changes in the incumbent’s vote share did correlate positively with the coverage of social grants – but only if no controls were included in the model. As soon as standard controls for economic variables (economic growth, inflation and unemployment) were included, grant coverage ceased to have any significant effect. Corrêa and Cheibub (2016) used data from one survey, in Brazil in 2010, that probed whether respondents favoured or opposed the expansion of Bolsa Família. They found that the small proportion of respondents who *opposed* the expansion of Bolsa Família swung *against* the incumbent. This was true even among former supporters of the incumbent. The negative reaction appeared to outweigh any positive effect of expanding Bolsa Família, i.e. the incumbent’s gain in mobilizing former non-voters was smaller than the loss of former supporters. Using proxy variables, Corrêa and Cheibub suggest that their findings in Brazil apply in other Latin American countries also. Expanding social grant programmes both increases and reduces support.

There are few comparable studies of the relationships between elections and social assistance in Africa. Existing studies of the politics of policy-making tend to suggest that electoral competition has rarely provided a strong impetus to reform and the actual electoral dividend has generally been modest. Policy-making elites have generally been conservative, resisting the blandishments of the international organisations and aid agencies that have promoted social protection. There have been exceptions: In Botswana, the governing Botswana Democratic Party secured repeated re-election – remaining in power for more than fifty years – in part through public provision in rural areas. Even here, perhaps because coverage is already broad, by the 2000s the incumbent and opposition parties shared a wariness of further expansion (Seekings, 2019a forthcoming). In Malawi, President Joyce Banda tried to brand herself as the champion of ‘handouts’ during her bid for re-election in 2014. But she came a poor third, with voters opting for parties that promised pro-farmer policies that would expand production instead (Hamer and Seekings, 2019 forthcoming).

The bulk of research into social grants and elections in Africa has focused on South Africa. In South Africa, the timing of the reforms that expanded the Child Support Grant in the 2000s suggested that the governing party – the African National Congress (ANC) – was trying to shore up its credibility as a pro-poor party in the face of its failure to tackle unemployment (Seekings, 2016). Similarly, after initially opposing the reduction of the age at which men became eligible for the old-age pension, the ANC and government embraced the reform prior to the 2009 elections (Seekings and Nattrass, 2015). On the other hand, the ANC and government have *not* resorted to populist increases in the real value of grants – even in the face of populist promises by the opposition Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). Nor has the ANC entertained seriously the introduction of new social assistance programmes (Seekings and Matisonn, 2012). The ANC government even tightened rules on access to disability grants (Kelly, 2013). Some ANC leaders have tried to use the grants for electoral purposes. One ANC provincial minister reportedly told voters in the province of KwaZulu-Natal that ‘those who receive grants and are voting for the opposition are stealing from government’, adding that those who vote for another party should ‘stay away from the grant’ (quoted in Patel *et al.*, 2014: 26). But the ANC’s election manifestos have generally been coy on the expansion of social assistance. The ANC leadership has comprised developmentalists and conservatives who denounce ‘handouts’ as well as advocates of expanded government responsibility (Seekings, 2019b forthcoming).

Whatever the thinking within the incumbent ANC, several studies using survey data suggest that the party earned an electoral dividend from the payment of social grants. Voters were asked in a national 2016 survey why they supported one or other party. Almost 40 percent opted for ‘the party’s ability to govern’

and 30 percent for ‘loyalty’. Twenty percent, however, opted for the response that they relied on social grants (Good Governance in Africa, 2016).<sup>1</sup> Paret (2018) used data from exit surveys of voters in selected areas close to Johannesburg during the 2014 national and 2016 local elections. The selected areas comprised poor and working-class urban townships and informal settlements, all within a two-hour drive from Johannesburg. In 2014, he found, grant recipients were more likely to vote for the ANC (84%) and less likely to vote for the EFF (8%) than non-recipients (74% and 14% respectively).<sup>2</sup> A 2013 survey of two poor urban neighbourhoods in Johannesburg (Riverlea and Doornkop) and one rural area in Limpopo (Groblersdal), conducted by the Centre for Social Development in Africa at the University of Johannesburg (CSDA/UJ), found that more than half of the respondents (59%) said that ‘they would vote for a party because “the party provides social grants for households like yours”’. Whilst most voters in these poor neighbourhoods believed that access to social grants (as well as free or subsidised public services) did not depend on who you voted for, almost half suspected that the programmes might not be continued if a party other than the ANC were to win power (Patel *et al.*, 2014; Sadie, Patel and Baldry, 2016).<sup>3</sup> A second, countrywide, survey conducted by CSDA/UJ in 2017 similarly found that grant recipients were more likely to vote ANC than non-recipients (Patel, Sadie and Bryer, 2018).

The correlation between receipt of a grant and voting intention in these studies is based on bivariate analysis and is not robust in multivariate models. Patel *et al.* concluded from the 2013 CSDA/UJ data that grants had ‘some influence in how people vote’ but it was ‘not a driving factor’. A multivariate model found that other factors – especially race and party identification<sup>4</sup> – were important, but receipt of a social grant was not (Patel *et al.*, 2014: 51; also Graham, Sadie and Patel, 2016; Ismail and Ulriksen, 2017). Multivariate analysis using the 2017 CSDA/UJ data also suggested that receipt of a grant did not matter (Patel, Sadie and Bryer, 2018).<sup>5</sup> Patel’s coauthored analysis of why the CSG was extended emphasized civil society activism and did not mention electoral incentives (Patel

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Lena Gronbach for this source.

<sup>2</sup> Paret reports only bivariate relationships, with no controls for other variables. It is not possible to identify precisely what underlies the relationship between grants and voting. For example, women were more likely to vote for the ANC than men. Is this because they get grants, or is it that grant recipients are more likely to vote ANC because they are women?

<sup>3</sup> Asked whether someone can get a grant regardless of which party they voted for, only 56% agreed, whilst 44% disagreed. Asked whether the government would continue to pay grants if another party ousted the ANC from government, 51% agreed, 25% disagreed, and 24% said that they did not know. Confidence in the sanctity of grants was lowest among ANC voters and highest among supporters of the opposition (at the time, primarily the DA).

<sup>4</sup> This begs the question whether some voters might identify with the ANC *because* it had extended grants to them or to other people.

<sup>5</sup> Paret (2018) also found that there was no statistically significant difference between the voting intentions of grant recipients and non-recipients in the 2016 local elections. Social assistance is, however, the responsibility of national (and provincial) government, not local government.

and Plageron, 2016).

The CSDA/UJ 2017 survey did find one effect of grants. Anxiety that the grant would be removed if another party took power was important in pushing some grant recipients to vote for the ANC more than non-recipients. One in four grant recipients said that one of the reasons they voted for the ANC was because they received a social grant and were afraid that another party would ‘not give [them] a grant’ (Patel, Sadie and Bryer, 2018).

None of these surveys considered the argument that social grant programmes also prompt opposition (as Corrêa argues for Latin America). The 2013 CSDA/UJ survey did find that, in these poor neighbourhoods, one in three respondents thought that grants discouraged work; this proportion was higher among non-recipients (37%) than among recipients (26%) (Patel *et al.*, 2014; see also Ismail and Ulriksen, 2017). Previous surveys in South Africa that were not concerned with voting behavior have shown that popular attitudes towards grants depend on the precise question. Asked whether, in general, the state should support poor people, most South Africans say yes. Asked whether individuals who spend their grants on alcohol should receive grants, then most South Africans say no (Seekings, 2007). A series of qualitative studies have drawn attention to different criticisms of social grants, especially of the Child Support Grant paid (mostly) to poor mothers. The general patriarchal view that grants should *not* be paid to young, unmarried women often overlaps with specific criticisms of the ‘abuse’ of grants by young women within families and a general preference for work over social grants (Dubbeld, 2013; Mosoetsa, 2011; Hickel, 2015; Mathis, 2011; Blake, 2018; Kelly, 2018; Dawson and Fouksman, 2017).

This paper examines how, in South Africa, social grants affect voting behaviour, using previously unanalyzed data from the countrywide 2018 Afrobarometer survey.<sup>6</sup> The paper focuses on the effects of both receiving grants and holding critical views of the grant programmes on assessments of the reported intention to vote for the incumbent party (the ANC), with and without controls for assessments of the incumbent government’s performance and partisan identification. The next section of the paper reports on the receipt of grants. The

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<sup>6</sup> Between 30 July and 26 September 2018, a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,829 adult South Africans was interviewed by The Afrobarometer’s National Partner in South Africa, Plus94 Research. The sample was stratified by province, race and urban-rural location. Primary Sampling Units (PSUs) were selected using data from the 2011 national census. Eight households were selected per PSU using randomly selected starting points and a specified walking pattern. Individual respondents within households were selected using gender quota (alternating interviews between men and women) and then random selection from the list of gender- and age-eligible household members. The contact rate was 92 percent. In contacted households, 67 percent cooperated, giving an overall response rate of 62 percent. Data are weighted to take into account purposive oversampling of some strata. Interviews were conducted in Afrikaans, English, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Tshivenda, IsiXhosa or IsiZulu.

following section examines the distribution of attitudes towards social grants, develops an index measuring hostility to social grants, and includes some simple models of these attitudes. The section thereafter models the effects of the receipt of social grants and attitudes towards grants on assessments of the performance of the governing party as well as partisan identification. The final section examines the effects on voting intentions. Following Bohn (2011), Layton and Smith (2015) and the CSDA/UJ studies (Patel *et al.*, 2014; Graham, Sadie and Patel, 2016; Ismail and Ulriksen, 2017; Patel, Sadie and Bryer, 2018), voting intentions are analysed primarily using multivariate models. The variables are specified in Appendix A. Selected models are reported in the text, with supplementary data in Appendix B.

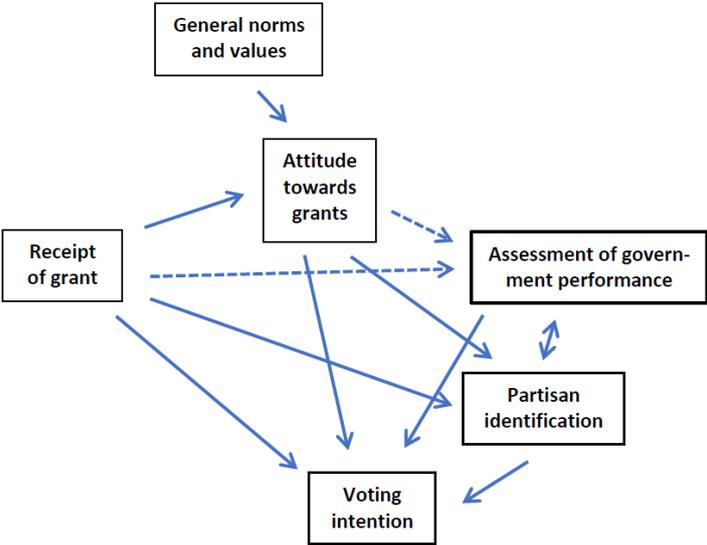


Figure 1: Model of social grants and voting behaviour

Figure 1 sets out the model underlying the analysis in this paper. The dashed lines indicate causal relationships that we would expect to be weak rather than strong, for reasons discussed in the text below. The paper is concerned primarily with the effects of both receipt of a grant and attitudes towards grants on voting intention. In addition to examining the direct, bivariate relationships between these, the paper examines how receipt of a grant and attitudes towards grants might affect assessments of government performance and partisan identification – and how these various factors might, in combination, shape voting intention.

## 2. The receipt of social grants and voting intention

Two out of three respondents (67 percent) reported that at least one person in the household had received one or other of the principal three grants over the previous 12 months (see Table B1 in the Appendix). Just over one half (54 percent) of all respondents lived in households where someone reportedly received a CSG. Just over one third (37 percent) lived in households where someone reportedly received an OAG. A small proportion (12 percent) lived in households where someone reportedly received a DG. The survey did not ask about other social grant programmes, which had much more limited reach. The survey did not ask precisely who received grants, so we are unable to distinguish between individuals who received the grant themselves and those who live in households in which someone else received a grant.

The reported receipt of grants in the Afrobarometer data is higher than suggested by other surveys. The 2017 General Household Survey – conducted by the parastatal agency, Statistics South Africa – found that 37 percent of households included someone receiving a CSG, 20 percent included someone receiving an OAG and 6 percent included someone receiving a DG. One half of all households included someone receiving a grant; one half did not.<sup>7</sup> The General Household Survey did not ask precisely the same question as Afrobarometer, asking about current receipt of grants rather than over the past twelve months. The General Household Survey data correspond closely to the official data on current grant payments. But this is unlikely to explain the difference in the reported receipt of grants, because there is not that much flux in the receipt of grants. A 2015 survey of South Africa – conducted as part of the Comparative National Elections Project (CNEP) – also found that 55 percent of households reported receiving at least one grant. Why the Afrobarometer survey found higher levels of reported grant receipt remains unclear.

The Afrobarometer survey found that, if elections were held ‘tomorrow’, 48 percent of respondents indicated that they would vote for the ANC, 11 percent for the DA, 11 percent for the EFF and 3 percent for other parties. One in six refused to answer and a smaller proportion replied that they did not know. Almost no one said that they would not vote. In reality, turnout in elections has declined steadily, especially among poorer voters (Schultz-Herzenberg, 2014a; Everatt, 2016). The Afrobarometer survey found that almost two out of three age-eligible voters reported that they had voted in the last election. People in

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<sup>7</sup> My calculations. The 2016 General Household Survey suggests very similar proportions as the 2017 Survey.

grant recipient households were more likely to say that they had voted than people in households where no one received a grant. The effect of grant receipt on reported turnout persisted even when controls are added for age and race.<sup>8</sup> There is thus some evidence that the apparent relationship between grant receipt and voting for the ANC might be in part due to the effects of social grants on turnout, as in much of Latin America (De la O, 2013; Layton and Smith, 2015; Corrêa and Cheibub, 2016).<sup>9</sup>

A simple, bivariate comparison of grant receipt and voting intention suggests that there is a relationship. Fifty percent of respondents in households that receive a grant say that they will vote for the ANC, against 40 percent of respondents in households that do not receive a grant. The correlation is statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 14.5$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). A bivariate logistic regression shows someone living in a household that receives one or more grants is about 45 percent more likely to vote for the ANC than someone who does not. These bivariate results are in line with similar bivariate findings from previous studies in South Africa (Paret, 2018; Patel, Sadie and Bryer, 2018).

### **3. Attitudes towards social grants**

Existing evidence on South Africans' attitudes towards social grants is mixed. Previous surveys have consistently found strong support for most social grants. For example, the 2015 CNEP survey found that 83 percent of a countrywide sample agreed (or agreed strongly) that the value of the old age pension should be increased, and 52 percent agreed even if it meant that people like the respondent would have to pay higher taxes.<sup>10</sup> Survey experiments using vignettes show that most people believe that the elderly, the sick and disabled and caregivers are deserving of financial support from the state (Seekings, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2018). Two out of three people in 2015 agreed that 'it is right that anyone who is poor should receive a pension or grant from the government'.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, qualitative researchers have found evidence that some people are very critical of at least some social grants. Receipt of a grant exposes individuals to moral scrutiny and judgement by family members, neighbours or

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<sup>8</sup> Excluding respondents who said that they were age-ineligible to have voted, 67% of people in grant-recipient households and 58% of people in households where no one received a grant said that they had voted. Ismail and Ulriksen (2017) report that the 2013 CSDA/UJ survey in Doornkop found higher turnout among grant recipients than among non-recipients, but the difference was not statistically significant. The 2015 CNEP survey also found that recipients were more likely to vote (81% recipients vs 71% non-recipients), but the effect was not robust when controls were included for age and race.

<sup>9</sup> This is consistent with either Ryabchuk's argument that non-voters are much like voters in South Africa, except for their ambivalence about voting and representative democracy (Ryabchuk, 2016), or Schulz-Herzenberg's argument that they differ in terms of social and organisational context (Schulz-Herzenberg, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> CNEP 2015 South Africa survey data, my calculations.

<sup>11</sup> CNEP 2015 South Africa survey data, my calculations.

others (Blake, 2018; Kelly, 2018). Conservative adherents to patriarchy – including especially, but not only, older rural men – denounce social grants (Mosoetsa, 2011).

The 2018 Afrobarometer survey found evidence of strong support for social grants. When asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement, ‘It is right that anyone who is poor should receive a pension or grant from the government’, three out of four respondents agreed or agreed strongly. Only one in five disagreed (see Table B2). Asked to make a ‘forced choice’ between the statements, ‘Poor people should be looked after by their families or kin and not depend on the government’ and ‘Government should look after people’, two out of three people agreed or agreed strongly with the second statement. Fewer than one in three agreed or agreed strongly with the first statement (see Table B3).

Support for social grants correlates only weakly or not at all with social, economic and demographic variables. Neither age nor gender has any effect. In terms of South Africa’s racial categorization, ‘coloured’ people are a little less positive, especially relative to ‘African’ people. People with higher education are also less positive. But employed respondents are relatively positive. South Africans also appear to have become more positive over time.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, many respondents in the Afrobarometer survey agreed with statements that criticized aspects of social grants. Table B2 reports responses to three such critical statements. In 2018, 43 percent of respondents agreed (or agreed strongly) that elderly people spend too much of their old age pensions on beer or alcoholic drinks. A higher proportion (60 percent) agreed that young women did this. The same proportion agreed that citizens become lazy when they rely on government grants or pensions. Whereas respondents were evenly divided on the question about elderly people, they were twice as likely to agree than to disagree with the other two statements.<sup>13</sup> Respondents were also asked whether grants should be conditional on work. This question probes for support for workfare rather than unconditional ‘handouts’.

The data from these six variables measuring attitudes towards social grants were combined into a composite index. Positive scores on this index reflected positive responses about grants; negative scores reflected negative responses. The index has values from a minimum of -12 (indicating very negative attitudes to social grants) to a maximum of +12 (indicating very positive views). The mean score was close to 0, and the standard deviation was 6. The distribution of values for this index varied little by most social, economic and demographic variables. Race was the only variable that showed up as significant, and this was weakly

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<sup>12</sup> Evident in comparison of 2018 data with data from 2015 CNEP, my calculations.

<sup>13</sup> Comparison of the data from 2015 and 2018 suggests that people have become more critical over time.

significant with modest effects. As shown in Figure 2(a), African people tend to have slightly more positive attitudes.

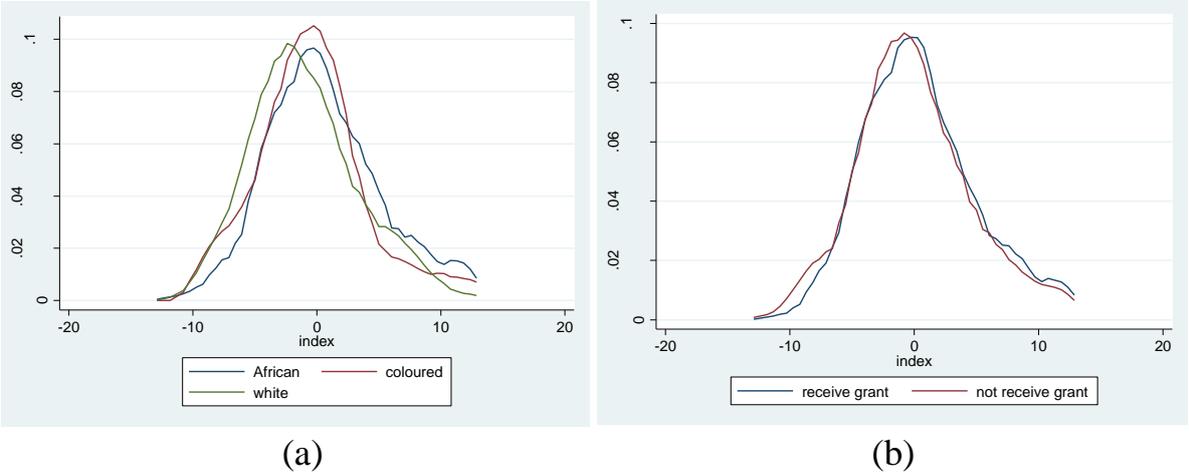


Figure 2: Index of attitudes to grants by (a) race and (b) receipt of any grant.

Figure 2(b) shows attitudes to grants according to whether the household included anyone who reportedly received a grant. The distributions are almost identical, suggesting that receipt of a grant within the household does not lead to positive attitudes towards grants. A bivariate regression suggests that receipt of a grant has a very weak effect on attitudes towards grants. Whilst the bivariate relationship is significant ( $p=0.026$ ), the effect is small and receipt of a grant explains almost none of the variation in attitudes.

Table 1 shows the results of a series of multivariate regression models in which attitudes towards grants or the CSG specifically are the dependent variable. The variables used are described in Appendix A. The first two models test the hypothesis that receipt of grants in a household results in a more positive attitude towards grants. The second set of two models tests the hypothesis that young women are more positive and older men more negative towards the CSG specifically. The first two models (1A and 1B) involve linear (ordinary least squares or OLS) regressions; the reported coefficients are marginal effects. The third and fourth models (2A and 2B) are probit regression models; the reported coefficients are average marginal effects.<sup>14</sup>

The first two models suggest that receipt of a grant does *not* make people more positive about grants. The basic model (1A) shows that being male or coloured is associated with being more negative about grants. Conservative gender views

<sup>14</sup> Marginal effects were also calculated using the dprobit command. The differences were very small.

have no effect. (All of these correlations are conditional on the inclusion of other variables in the model). Model 1B adds the variable for receipt of any grant. There is no statistically significant relationship between this and attitudes towards grants (in this multivariate model); including this variable makes no difference to the overall model. Neither model explains much of the variance in attitudes towards grants (with an r-squared of only 2 percent).

*Table 1: Modelling attitudes towards grants*

	Index of attitudes		Criticism of CSG specifically #	
	Model 1A	Model 1B	Model 2A	Model 2B
Receipt of any grant #		NS		
Receipt of CSG #				NS
Coloured #	-0.96 (0.4) *	-1.1 (0.4) **	0.66 (0.13) ***	0.22 (0.04) ***
African #	0.67 (0.32) *	NS	0.30 (0.10) **	0.11 (0.04) **
Aged 56 or more	NS	NS		
Male #	-0.48 (0.22) *	-0.4 (0.2) *		
Elderly man #			NS	NS
Young woman #			NS	NS
Conservative gender views #	NS	NS	NS	NS
constant	NS	NS	NS	NS
r-squared	0.02	0.02		
F statistic	F(5,444) = 8.18***	F(6,443) = 7.06***	F(5,444) = 5.92***	F(6,448) = 5.14***
N	1840	1840	1840	1840
Statistical significance: *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, NS indicates not significant # indicates a dummy variable See Appendix A for a full description of the variables Models 1A and 1B are OLS regressions; models 2A and 2B probit regressions (reporting average marginal effects); all using svy commands				

Models 2A and 2B test whether specific demographic groups are especially ill-disposed towards CSGs. Given that young women are the primary beneficiaries of CSGs, they might be expected to be more favourable. Older men, on the other hand, might hold patriarchal views and be opposed to paying grants to young (often unmarried) women. Model 2A suggests that neither young women nor old men have distinctive attitudes towards CSGs. Model 2B shows that this finding remains firm even when we control for whether any household member

receives a CSG. Young women are not particularly well-disposed towards CSGs and older men are not particularly ill-disposed towards them. Nor do conservative gender attitudes seem to explain variation in attitudes towards the CSG.

These multivariate models confirm that the considerable variation in attitudes towards social grants is weakly associated with demographic factors but not with generally conservative views on gender nor – most importantly – by receipt of a grant. Attitudes towards grants do vary, but the variation is substantially independent of whether or not someone in the household receives a grant.

In the preceding section we saw that receipt of grants appears to correlate, weakly, with voting intention. The effects of attitudes towards grants on voting are less clear cut. Bivariate analysis suggests that having a negative attitude towards grants has a positive but very weak effect on intention to vote for the DA. Figure 3 shows the distribution of attitudes towards grants, using the index discussed above, by voting intention. There is no statistically significant difference between the distribution of attitudes of ANC and EFF voters.

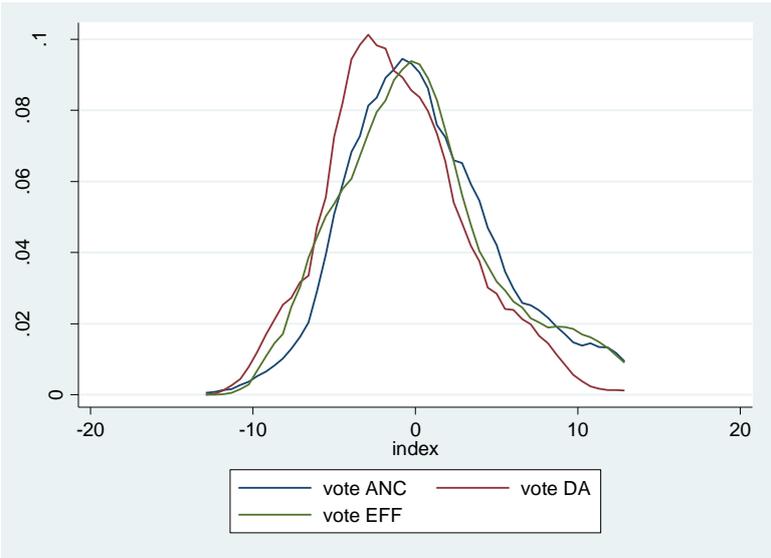


Figure 3: Attitudes to grants, by voting intention

The two primary opposition parties in South Africa have contrasting positions on social grants. The DA’s formal public position on social grants has generally been cautiously positive, although it is possible that some voters view this with skepticism. The EFF, in contrast, has loudly proclaimed its promises to increase the value of social grants. It is perhaps thus not surprising that neither receipt of a grant nor attitudes towards grants correlated with intention to vote for the ANC compared with intention to vote for the EFF. This latter finding contrasts with Paret’s finding, using data collected in selected neighbourhoods around

Johannesburg, that grant recipients were more likely to vote for the ANC and less likely to vote for the EFF (Paret, 2018).

These bivariate relationships between receipt of a grant or attitudes towards grants and voting intention may reflect other factors (as the CSDA/UJ surveys found in South Africa). The rest of this paper builds more complex models of political attitudes and behavior in order to identify more precisely whether social grants do affect voting intention and, if so, how.

## 4. Performance assessments and partisan identification

Analyses of voting behavior in South Africa (as elsewhere) have focused on three sets of factors: enduring, deep-rooted loyalties to political parties (partisan identification: see Mattes, 1995; Schulz-Herzenberg, 2014b); assessments of the government's performance (retrospective 'issue' voting: see Mattes, Taylor and Africa, 1999);<sup>15</sup> and the role of identity (especially, in the South African case, race; see Ferree, 2006; Friedman, 2005; also Seekings, 2006).<sup>16</sup> Distinguishing empirically between the effects of the first two of these sets of factors is challenging given that the causal relationships between most of them might run in both directions. For example, people might assess a party's performance strongly because they identify with it, or their assessments might be the reason why they are or remain loyal to the party. In this section I examine whether people who live in households where someone receives a social grant are more likely to approve of the government's performance or to identify with the incumbent party, and whether people who agree with criticisms of social grants are less likely to approve of the government's performance or identify with the incumbent party. I also examine how race affects voters' attitudes. Because the relationship between assessments of government performance and identification with the incumbent party might run in either direction, I present results of running a series of regression models for each of these two dependent variables (see Table 2).

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<sup>15</sup> Few South African studies have examined prospective issue-voting, i.e. voters' assessments of what parties will deliver if elected.

<sup>16</sup> Patel *et al.* (2014) also try to assess the role of patronage or clientelism in voting behaviour.

*Table 2: Modelling assessments of government performance and identification with incumbent party*

	Government performance (index)				Partisan identification with ANC #			
	Model 3A	Model 3B	Model 3C	Model 3D	Model 4A	Model 4B	Model 4C	Model 4D
Receipt of any grant #			NS	NS			NS	NS
Positive attitudes towards grants (index)			-0.07 (0.03) **	-0.07 (0.03) **			NS	NS
Own economic position	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Own relative economic position	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Perceived national economic conditions (index)	0.39 (0.05) ***	0.37 (0.05) ***	0.38 (0.05) ***	0.37 (0.05) ***	0.01 (0.004) **	0.01 (0.004) *	0.13 (0.04) **	0.01 (0.004) *
Perceived other conditions (index)	0.34 (0.02) ***	0.33 (0.02) ***	0.35 (0.02) ***	0.34 (0.02) ***	0.005 (0.002) **	NS	0.005 (0.002) **	NS
Assessment of government performance (index)						0.007 (0.002) ***		0.01 (0.002) ***
Controls for age, gender, education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Identify with ANC #		1.10 (0.28) ***		1.12 (0.28) ***				
African #	NS	NS	NS	NS	0.26 (0.02) ***	0.26 (0.02) ***	0.25 (0.02) ***	0.25 (0.02) ***
Constant	-3.4 (0.5) ***	-3.5 (0.5) ***	-3.9 (0.6) ***	-3.6 (0.6) ***	***	***	***	***
r-squared	0.19	0.20	0.20	0.20				
F statistic	F(14,435) = 33.6 ***	F(15,434) = 32.8 ***	F(15,434) = 31.2 ***	F(16,433) = 30.6 ***	F(14,448) = 13.4 ***	F(15,448) = 13.4 ***	F(16,448) = 11.8 ***	F(17,448) = 11.8 ***
N	1840	1840	1840	1840	1840	1840	1840	1840
Statistical significance: *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, NS indicates not significant # indicates a dummy variable See Appendix A for a full description of the variables Models 3A to 3D are OLS regressions; models 4A to 4D are probit regressions (reporting average marginal effects); all using svy commands								

The Afrobarometer survey did not ask respondents to assess the overall performance of the government. It questioned respondents on their assessment of the government's performance on specific topics (including poverty and inequality) and of the performance of the current president (Cyril Ramaphosa) and his predecessor (Jacob Zuma). I constructed an index using responses to six of the questions on government performance, covering the economy, poverty, crime, corruption, immigration and the provision of electricity. Scores on the index could lie between a minimum possible score of -12 and a maximum possible score of +12. The mean score was -4, with a standard deviation of 6.

The first set of models reported in Table 2 test whether receipt of a grant or positive attitudes towards grants are associated with positive assessments of government performance. Model 3A includes a set of controls: an index measuring perceived economic conditions in the country, a second index measuring perceived changes in other conditions and two variables measuring personal economic position. These indices are described in Appendix A. The model also includes standard demographic controls (age and gender) as well as race (which is not significant in and makes no difference to this model or any of models 3A through 3D). Model 3B adds a variable measuring partisan identification with the ANC.

Models 3C and 3D add in variables for receipt of grant and attitudes towards grants in order to ascertain whether their inclusion changes the results. There seems to be no relationship between receipt of a grant and overall assessment of the government's performance (see Model 3C) whilst the relationship between positive attitudes to a grant and assessment of government performance is counter-intuitively negative. It is possible that negative assessments of government performance – including economic performance – prompt a more positive attitude towards social grants, i.e. that support for social grants is stronger if the government is seen to have performed poorly with respect to economic growth, job creation and so on.

The Afrobarometer survey also asked about partisan identification, using responses the standard question 'do you feel close to any particular political party?' The survey found that 28 percent of respondents identified with the ANC, half as many (13 percent) identified with an opposition party, and more than one half said that they did not feel close to any party. About 5 percent refused to answer. These responses are in line with previous surveys, which showed a decline in identification with the ANC in the 2010s (Schulz-Herzenberg, 2014a).<sup>17</sup> A simple bivariate comparison of grant receipt (or

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<sup>17</sup> It is not clear that partisan identification is as distinct from voting intention in South Africa as it is in the USA (where the concept of partisan identification originated). Voters in South Africa rarely have the opportunity to 'defect' temporarily from a party with which they have a long-standing loyalty, and surveys find little evidence

attitudes towards grants) and partisan identification suggests that there is a relationship. Thirty percent of respondents in households that receive a grant said that they identified with the ANC, against 24 percent of respondents in households that did not receive a grant. Table 2 shows that this effect disappears in multivariate models. Models 4A and 4B regress identification with the incumbent party (the ANC) without any variables for grant receipt or attitudes towards grants. When the models are rerun including these two variables, the relationships are not significant and the models are not improved. Grants seem to make no difference to identification with the ANC. Identification with the ANC seems to be driven primarily by race reinforced by positive assessments of the government's performance generally.<sup>18</sup>

## 5. Voting intention

We are now in a position to examine whether the bivariate relationship between grants – both receipt and attitudes – and voting is robust when we control for other factors in multivariate models. Table 3 presents the results of a series of multivariate models of voting behaviour, firstly omitting and then including variables measuring receipt of a grant and attitudes towards grants. Multivariate models provide an opportunity to examine the effects of multiple factors on respondents' declared vote. Receipt of a grant or attitudes towards grants are just two factors in a long list of factors that might determine a respondent's vote preference. The models reported in Table 3 include controls for partisan identification and assessment of government performance. Table 3 shows that, controlling for these other factors, there is no statistically significant correlation between either receipt of a grant or attitudes towards grants and voting for the incumbent party. The inclusion of grant receipt and attitudes in the models does not improve them at all.

It is to be expected that there will be a close relationship between partisan identification and voting intention, although partisan identification cannot explain the intention of 'independent' voters. Evaluations of government are likely to inform both partisan identification (as we saw above) and voting intention. Figures 4(a) and 4(b) below show the distribution of evaluations of government performance, using the index discussed above (aggregating evaluations of performance in six areas, i.e. the economy, poverty, crime, corruption, immigration and the provision of electricity), by voting intention.

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of such defections. The AB survey found that 3% of respondents reported being close to one party but an intention to vote for a different party. (See further Schulz-Herzenberg, 2014b.)

<sup>18</sup> This accords with the conclusions of Ismail and Ulriksen (2017). Controlling for assessments of government performance, they found that the relationship between receipt of a grant and partisan identification was not quite significant at the 5 percent level ( $p=0.053$ ). Other factors were more important than receipt of a grant. Gordon, Struwig and Roberts (2018) also found that race was the most important correlate of partisan identification.

Figure 4(a) shows the distributions for all respondents reporting an intention to vote for the ANC, DA or EFF. Whilst even many ANC voters were critical of the government’s performance (with a mean score of -3), it is evident that EFF and especially DA voters were even more critical (with mean scores of -4 and -5 respectively). Figure 4(b) shows the distributions for ‘independent’ ANC, DA and EFF voters, i.e. voters who say they intend to vote for each party but do not feel close to it. These distributions are almost identical to the distributions for all voters (shown in Figure 4(a)), as are the mean scores.

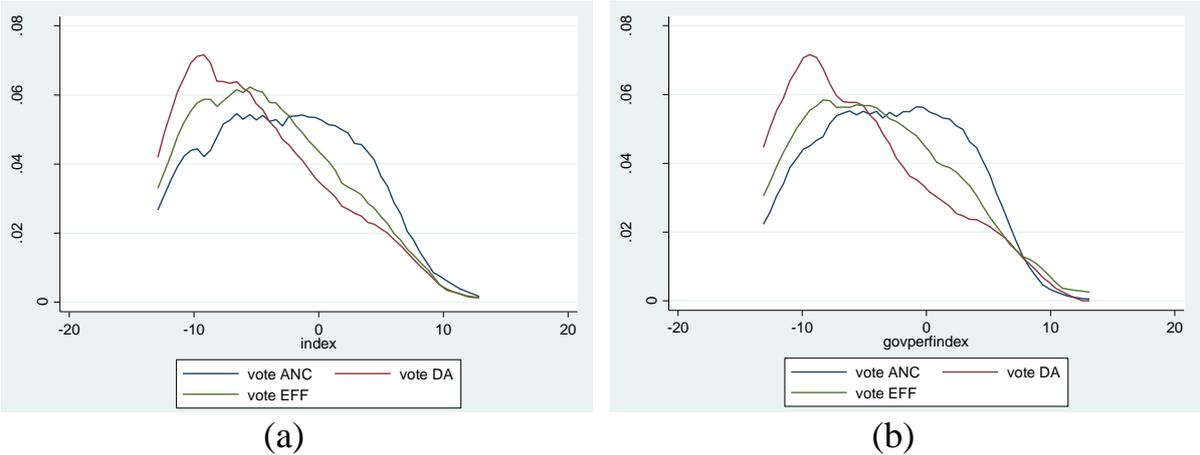


Figure 4: Evaluations of government performance by voting intention, for (a) all voters and (b) independent voters.

Table 3 reports the results of a series of probit regressions. The dependent variable is intention to vote for the incumbent party (i.e. the ANC). Controls are included (but not reported) for standard demographic variables. The first four models test different explanations of voting without any reference to grants. Model 5A tests whether assessments of government performance explain the intention to vote for the ANC. The three variables – general performance, the performance of former president Zuma and the performance of current president Ramaphosa<sup>19</sup> – are all significant, but the model only explains a small proportion of variation in voting intention. Model 5B tests whether partisan identification matters. Including a measure of identification with the ANC explains a much larger share of the variation in voting intention.<sup>20</sup> Comparing models 5A and 5B implies that partisan identification is more important than retrospective assessments of performance. Model 5C combines the preceding two models. Model 5D adds race. Even controlling for assessments and identification, being African contributes significantly to an intention to vote for

<sup>19</sup> Assessments of the performance of recently-appointed President Ramaphosa and former President Zuma should be independent of receipt of grants given that neither president presided over the expansion of social grant programmes.

<sup>20</sup> Calculated using the old ‘dprobit’ command, the ‘pseudo r-squared’ for Model 5B is 0.28 compared with 0.08 for Model 5A.

the ANC.<sup>21</sup>

*Table 3: Modelling vote for incumbent party #*

	Model 5A	Model 5B	Model 5C	Model 5D	Model 5E	Model 5F	Model 5G	Model 5H
Receipt of a grant #					NS	NS	NS	NS
Positive attitudes towards grants (index)					NS	NS	NS	NS
Government performed well (index)	0.02 (0.00) ***		0.01 (0.00) ***	0.01 (0.02) ***	0.02 (0.00) ***		0.01 (0.00) ***	0.01 (0.00) ***
Former president Zuma performed well #	0.12 (0.03) ***		0.05 (0.02) *	NS	0.12 (0.03) ***		0.05 (0.02) *	NS
President Ramaphosa performing well #	0.12 (0.02) ***		0.08 (0.02) ***	0.08 (0.02) ***	0.12 (0.02) ***		0.08 (0.02) ***	0.08 (0.02) ***
Controls for age, gender, education and poverty	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Identify with ANC #		0.61 (0.02) ***	0.59 (0.02) ***	0.54 (0.02) ***		0.61 (0.21) ***	0.59 (0.02) ***	0.54 (0.02) ***
African #				0.22 (0.03) ***				0.22 (0.02) ***
Wald test for probit model	F(12,448) = 15.1 ***	F(10,448) = 50 ***	F(13,448) = 40.7 ***	F(14,448) = 40.8 ***	F(14,448) = 13.2 ***	F(12,448) = 41.9 ***	F(15,448) = 35.5 ***	F(16,448) = 35.7 ***
N	1803	1818	1803	1803	1803	1818	1803	1803
Statistical significance: *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, NS indicates not significant, i.e. p>0.05 # indicates a dummy variable See Appendix A for a full description of the variables All models are probit regressions (reporting average marginal effects), using svy commands								

Models 5E through 5H simply add into the preceding models variables for receipt of a grant and attitudes towards grants. In none of these models does receipt of a grant or attitudes towards grants correlate with intention to vote for the ANC.<sup>22</sup> These models confirm the conclusion from the first four models: Intention to vote for the ANC correlates strongly with identification with the

<sup>21</sup> The 'pseudo r-squared' for Model 5C is 0.31 and for Model 5D it is 0.34.

<sup>22</sup> Nor does the inclusion of these variables make any difference to the 'pseudo-r-squared' for the models.

ANC and, more weakly, with assessments of the (ANC) government's performance. A one standard deviation increase in the assessment of government performance increased the average marginal probability of voting for the ANC by less than 10 percentage points, whilst identifying with the ANC increased the average marginal probability of voting for the ANC by between 54 and 61 percentage points (conditional on the other variables in the models).

Table 3 reports the results of models using data for all respondents, i.e. respondents who reported an intention to vote for the ANC, an intention to vote for the DA, an intention to vote for the EFF or an intention to vote for one or other minor party, as well as respondents who could or did not say which party they intended to support. The results of Model 5H are replicated even if it is limited to ANC and DA voters. In other words, receipt of a grant or attitudes towards grants does not help to distinguish between ANC and DA voters. The same is true for ANC and EFF voters. Only if DA and EFF voters are compared do attitudes to grants matter: a negative attitude to grants is associated with a higher likelihood of voting for the DA relative to voting for the EFF. Voters might distinguish between opposition parties in part on the basis of their attitudes to grants, but those attitudes do not seem to be relevant to the decision to vote for the incumbent ANC rather than any of the opposition parties.

## 6. Conclusion

South African voters decide whether or not to vote for the incumbent ANC primarily on the basis of partisan identification, their assessment of the overall performance of the ANC government, and race. Receipt of a grant and general attitudes towards grants make little or no difference to this calculation. Whilst bivariate analysis suggested that receipt of a grant and attitudes towards grants do matter for voting intentions, the multivariate analyses showed that these correlations are the result of other factors and do not indicate a causal relationship. This finding corroborates the findings of studies by the CSDA/UJ team (Patel *et al.*, 2014; Ismail and Ulriksen, 2017; Patel, Sadie and Bryer, 2018).

This paper goes beyond previous studies in examining not only the receipt of grants but also overall attitudes towards grants. In South Africa, as in Latin America and elsewhere, the expansion of social grants has prompted a conservative backlash, among voters who are discontent with either the cost of grants or (more commonly in South Africa) their supposed negative behavioural effects (including making recipients lazy and encouraging drinking). I showed that attitudes towards grants were largely independent of receipt of a grant: There was no evidence that people living in households where someone receives

a social grant were less likely to agree with criticisms of grants. I also found no evidence that young women were less likely to agree with criticisms of CSGs specifically or that conservative older men were more likely to agree with those criticisms. This accords with existing qualitative research that suggested that household members might be critical of grants even when – or perhaps because – other household members receive them (e.g. Mosoetsa, 2011) as well as with research that shows that even prospective beneficiaries might oppose the expansion of social assistance to people like them (e.g. Dawson and Fouksman, 2017).

I found no evidence that people living in households where someone receives a social grant are more likely to approve of the government's overall performance. I did find an inverse relationship between support for social grants and approval of the government's overall performance, perhaps because voters who were critical of the government's poor economic performance were more likely to support social grants as a safety net. I found no evidence that people living in households where someone receives a social grant are more likely to identify with the governing party or that people who agree with criticisms of social grants are less likely to identify with the governing party.

The one way in which receipt of a grant might have an effect on voting for the ANC is via turnout, modestly boosting turnout among ANC supporters. This is in line with Latin American studies. It is also consistent with Patel *et al.*'s (2014) finding that some grant recipients were anxious about the prospect of other parties retrenching social grant programmes. The Afrobarometer survey did not ask questions pertaining to this anxiety.

The overall finding that social grants make little or no difference to voting behaviour is perhaps not surprising given the context. First, many grant recipients might take their grants for granted: The very fact that social grants are so widespread in South Africa might explain why grant recipients do not seem to be moved to support the ANC. Just as the ANC is not held responsible for unemployment (although it is faulted for its failure to take effective remedial action), so the ANC might not be given credit for the institutionalization of social grants. Secondly, there are many other factors weighing on South African voters' decisions over which party – if any – to support: economic management and the lack of employment opportunities, crime and violence, corruption, the memory of apartheid and democratization, and racialized inequality and distrust. Thirdly, the competing political parties in South Africa have not sought to brand themselves primarily with respect to social grants. Individual politicians might try to use social grants to mobilise or threaten voters, but both of the two major parties (the ANC and DA) are wary, in part because of internal disagreements and perhaps in part also because of a sense that voters have varied views.

Two limitations to the analysis need to be acknowledged. First, the survey asked about the receipt of grants within the household, not by the individual respondent. The effects of directly receiving a grant might be different to the effects of sharing a household with someone else who receives a grant. The data on attitudes towards grants and voting intention are, however, at the individual level. Secondly, the survey found a surprisingly high proportion of households reporting that at least one person in the household received a grant.

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# Appendix A: Variable specification

Table A: Variable specification

Variable	Source: Afrobarometer survey South Africa 2018 variables	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Receipt of any grant (within household) #	Constructed from Q80A_SAF, Q80B_SAF and Q80C_SAF	0.65	0.48	0	1
Receipt of CSG (within household) #	Constructed from Q80A_SAF	0.52	0.50	0	1
Coloured #	Q102==3	0.13	0.34	0	1
African #	Q102==1	0.76	0.42	0	1
Age 18 to 25 (etc.) #	Age categories constructed from AGE_COND			0	1
Male #	Q101==1	0.5	0.5	0	1
Higher education #	EDUC_COND==3	0.22	0.41	0	1
Elderly man #	Male and age 56+	0.07	-0.25	0	1
Young woman #	Female and age 18-34	0.25	0.43	0	1
Conservative gender views #	Index constructed using Q38D, Q38E and Q38F	-1.0	2.5	-6	6
Positive attitudes towards grants (index)	Index constructed using Q80D1_SAF and Q80D2_SAF, Q80D3_SAF, Q80D4_SAF, Q80D5_SAF and Q81A_SAF	0.33	4.6	-12	12
Own economic position	Constructed from Q4B	-0.22	1.4	-2	2
Lived poverty	Variable in Afrobarometer dataset	0.97	0.88	0	4
Own relative economic position	Constructed from Q5	0.1	1.1	-2	2
Perceived national economic position (index)	Index constructed using Q4A, Q6 and Q7	-0.8	2.6	-6	6
Perceived other conditions (index)	Index constructed using Q57A, Q57B, Q57C, Q57D, Q57E, Q57F and Q57G	0.80	5.9	-14	14
Assessment of government performance (index)	Index constructed using Q56A, Q56B, Q56F, Q56K, Q56M and Q56U_SAF	-3.9	5.7	-12	12
Identify with ANC #	Q88B==102	0.28	0.45	0	1
Former president Zuma performed well #	Constructed from Q58A1_SAF	0.24	0.42	0	1
President Ramaphosa performing well #	Constructed from Q58A	0.56	0.50	0	1
Voted in last election #	Q22==1 (omit Q22==8, underage)	0.64	0.48	0	1
Intend to vote for ANC #	Q99==702	0.46	0.50	0	1

## Appendix B: Additional tables

*Table B1: Receipt of social grants, 2018*

In the past twelve months, have you or anyone in this household received from the government ...	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't know (%)	Total (%)
A Child Support Grant?	54	45	1	100
An Old Age Pension	37	63	0	100
A Disability Grant?	12	88	0	100
Any of the above?	67	33	0	100
Source: Afrobarometer survey South Africa 2018 variables Q80A_SAF, Q80B_SAF and Q80C_SAF.				

*Table B2: Attitudes towards social grants, South Africa, 2018*

	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neither agree nor disagree %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Don't know %	Total %
It is right that anyone who is poor should receive a pension or grant from the government	8	11	4	35	41	3	100
	19			76			
Elderly people spend too much of their old age pensions on beer or alcoholic drinks.	22	23	10	25	18	3	100
	45			43			
Young women spend too much of their child support grants on beer or other alcoholic drinks.	14	14	8	28	32	3	100
	28			60			
Citizens become lazy when they rely on government grants or old age pensions	13	16	10	30	30	2	100
	29			60			
Able[-bodied] adults required to work for money received from government	17	18	10	28	25	2	100
	35			53			
Source: Afrobarometer survey South Africa 2018, questions Q80D1_SAF, Q80D2_SAF, Q80D3_SAF, Q80D4_SAF and Q80D5_SAF.							

*Table B3: The responsibilities of state and kin*

Which of the following statements is closest to your view?		%	%
Poor people should be looked after by their families or kin and not depend on the government	Agree strongly	16	29
	Agree	13	
	Neither	3	3
The government should look after people	Agree	17	67
	Agree strongly	50	
Don't know		1	1
Total		100	100
Source: Afrobarometer survey South Africa 2018 variable Q81A_SAF			