

COSATU members' attitudes towards the 1999 elections

In 1994 a survey of COSATU members' attitudes towards the then upcoming 1994 elections was conducted by academics from the universities of Cape Town, Rhodes, Port Elizabeth, Natal and Witwatersrand. They looked at the political attitudes and hopes of COSATU members towards South Africa's first democratic election. In 1998 the survey was repeated, this time round with the help of Naledi. Our aim was to assess the attitudes of the labour movement, and COSATU members in particular.

The method and the sample

The main technique used to gather the data in both 1994 and 1998 was a nation-

Christine Psoulis reports on COSATU members' attitudes to the elections and workplace democracy.

wide survey. The 1998 questionnaire was largely based on the 1994 questionnaire with a few changes. The changes updated issues and included more questions. The total sample size target for 1998 was 650 cases.

Similar sampling methods were used for both surveys although a completely new sample was drawn up for the second

Figure one: Union affiliation

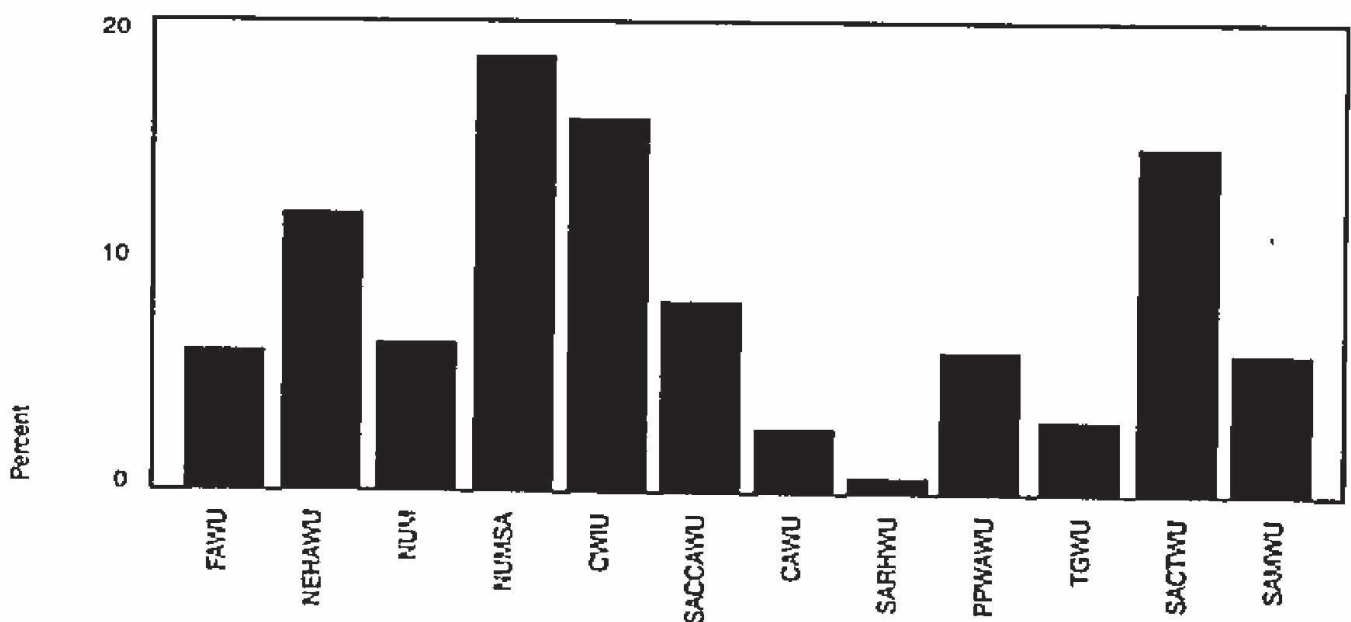
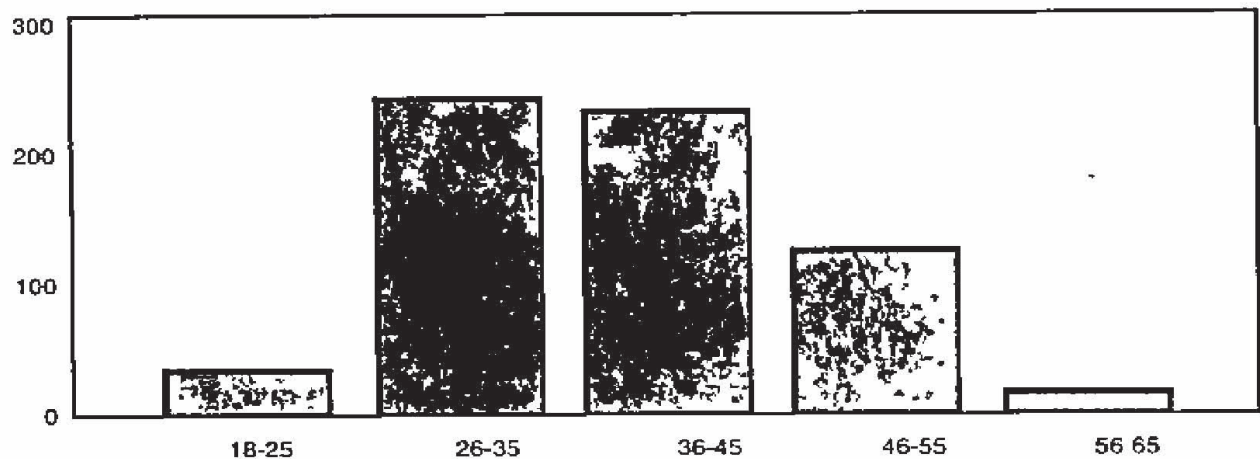
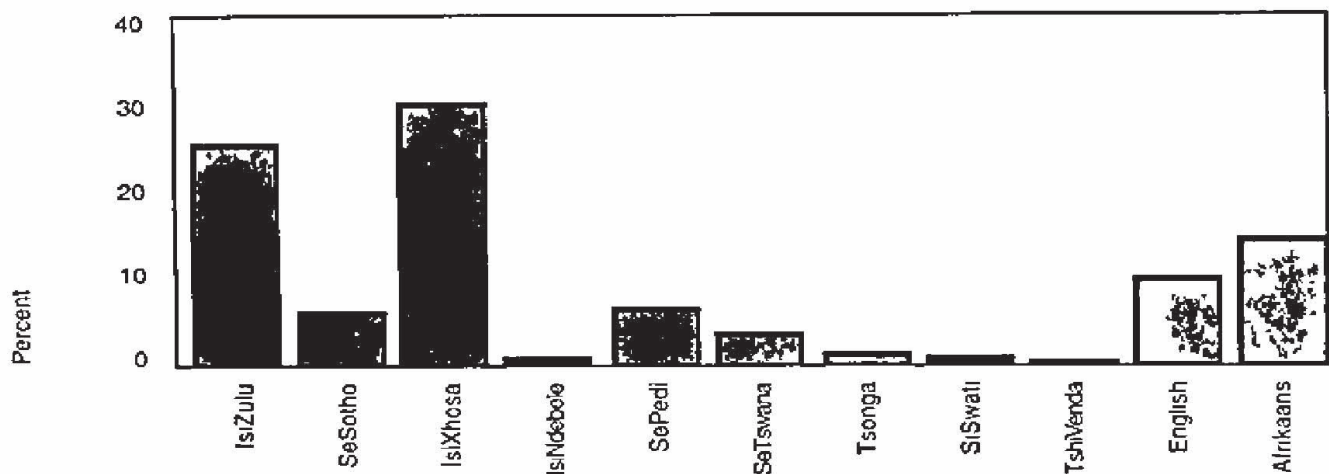


Figure two: Age of respondents**Figure three: Language of respondents**

survey The sample made sure that workers in the main industrial areas (Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and Western Cape) were proportionally represented. The 1998 survey also included the mining sector (in Gauteng), which was not in the 1994 survey. Statistical tests showed that the sample was representative of COSATU members.

Researchers contacted the regional COSATU offices to inform them of the research and gain permission to do the research in the identified workplaces. Researchers conducted face-to-face interviews.

They aimed to interview two

shopstewards and eight ordinary members in each workplace.

Who was surveyed?

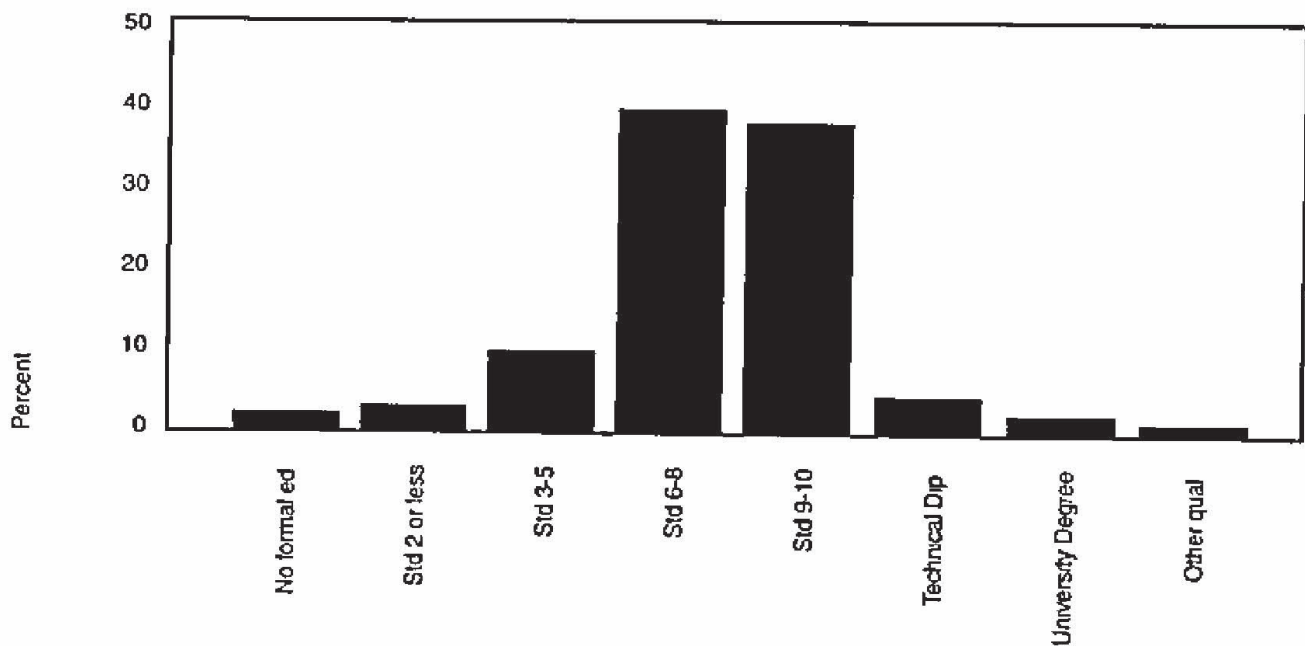
Union members

The 1998 survey interviewed most of the federations' affiliates. It did not include members of SADTU, POPCRU and SASBO. Most people interviewed belonged to NUMSA (18%) and SACCAWU (16%).

Gender

In the 1998 study, two-thirds (69%) of the respondents were male and a third (30%) were female.

Figure four: Level of education



Skills

Most of the respondents were semi-skilled (35%) or skilled (30%).

Age

The largest group of respondents (36%) were between 26 and 35 years old

Language

The largest group of respondents were Xhosa speaking

Education

Most of the respondents (38%) had a standard six, standard seven or standard 8 education. Most respondents had been to high school but did not complete it. Some respondents (7%) had a technical diploma or university degree.

Union democratic structures?

The study tried to find out how COSATU members understood union democracy and its relationship to political democracy.

Unions have continued to sustain strong shopfloor structures most

shopstewards (92%) were elected by show of hand or by secret ballot.

It seems as if there has been an increase since 1991 in the extent to which members want to mandate their shopstewards. In the 1998 survey most workers insisted on consultation (50%) and expect their shopsteward to report back to them every time the shopsteward acts on their behalf (76%)

Table 1: Who are you going to vote for in the upcoming election?

PARTY	1994	1998
ANC/SACP/COSATU	75%	74%
AZAPO	0%	0,2%
DP	1%	0,5%
IFP	1%	1%
NP	5%	4%
PAC	1%	0,6%
UDM	-	3%
Have not decided	-	4,1%
Will not vote	-	11%

n 1994 = 643
n 1998 = 646
 missing 1994 = 15%
 missing 1998 = 1,6%
 other 1994 = 1%



COSATU will help mobilise the vote for the ANC.

ninety three percent of workers said that if shopstewards did not report back they would remove the shopsteward. Most COSATU members attend union meetings either once a week (37%) or once a month (34%)

An important finding of the 1998 study is that knowledge of Nedlac has increased (37%) slightly since 1994. In 1994, workers knowledge of Nedlac's predecessors - the National Manpower Commission (NMC) and National Economic Forum (NEF) - was 23% and 22% respectively. Eighty-one percent of workers in 1998 said that they know what the RDP is. Very few (33%) know what Gear is and those who know about it do not have strong views on it

Political democracy?

The main aim of the study was to examine COSATU members' attitudes towards political democracy. Many workers seem to be happy to have former unionists in Parliament and feel that COSATU's decision to send 20

unionists to parliament was the right decision (67%).

We were interested to see if COSATU members still supported the ANC. Table 1 compares the voting behaviour of COSATU members in 1994 and 1999. It is most striking that support for the ANC has not changed since 1994. Seventy-four percent of COSATU members indicated that they would vote for the ANC/SACP/COSATU alliance in the 1999 elections (as opposed to 75% who said they would be doing so in 1994).

Table 2 compares COSATU members' voting behaviour in 1999 and the region they live in (see table 2). Interestingly, only 0,8% of COSATU members in KwaZulu-Natal support the IFP. There is some support for the new political party, the UDM in the Eastern Cape (2,9%) and in the Western Cape (4,8%).

Most workers (54%) feel they cannot rely on political parties to protect their interests. They feel they will always need trade unions to protect their interests (93%)

Table 2: Cross-tabulation of voting preference with region

Party	Gauteng	KZN	Eastern Cape	Western Cape
ANC/SACP/ COSATU	83%	73,8%	80%	54,8%
AZAPO	-	-	0,6%	-
DEMOCRATIC PARTY	0%	1,6%	0,6%	-
IFP	2%	0,8%	0,6%	-
NP	0,4%	4,1%	3,5%	10,2%
PAC	1,3%	-	0,6%	-
UDM	2,2%	2,5%	2,9%	4,8%
Do not intend to vote	7,6%	12,3%	10,6%	15,1%
Have not decided	3,1%	4,9%	0,6%	11,9%
Other party	0,4%	-	-	3,3%

We asked an open-ended question on how workers felt the new government, elected in 1999, would improve their lives. We ranked their responses (see table 3)

- workers want services delivered and infrastructure improved,
- workers want to receive higher wages;
- workers want more job creation and to be economically empowered,
- workers want the new government to restore law and order;
- workers want to see people being treated equally and racism/

discrimination abolished.

Day-to-day issues in the workplace and life are central to workers' expectations. Law and order emerged in the 1998 survey as one of the issues facing workers. They emphasise the need to 'bring back law and order'. In 1991 COSATU members had very high expectations of how the RDP would improve their lives and what services would be delivered to them. In the 1998 survey we attempted to establish to what extent their expectations have been fulfilled (see table 3) Workers feel delivery has taken place in

Table 3: Expectations and Delivery

SERVICE	1994	1998
Clean water	82%	81%
Electricity	85%	81%
Telephones	72%	76%
Safe and healthy working environment	86%	64%
Better health	87%	63%
Access to education and training	90%	62%
Housing	91%	55%
Better public transport	79%	54%
Enough nutritional food	77%	53%
Access to land	81%	52%
Higher wages	79%	41%

three areas: clean water (81%), electricity (81%) and telephones (76%) Workers feel that there was the least effective delivery on their demands for higher wages (41%) and for access to land (52%)

The satisfaction with water, electricity and telephones is not surprising as it seems to be an area in which the government has been

Table 4: What will workers do if the new government elected in 1999 does not deliver?

ACTION	1994	1998
Put pressure on former unionists sent to Parliament	66%	70%
Vote for another party in the next election	40%	37%
Form an alternative party that will provide these benefits to workers	29%	33%
Participate in ongoing mass action to force the government to deliver on its promises	72%	53%
Workers will do nothing	4%	.5%

most effective in delivery. Clearly, in other areas, workers' expectations have only partially been fulfilled.

The response of Cosatu members to how they will respond if the government elected in 1999 fails to deliver on its electoral promises is very interesting. In the 1994 survey a number of responses were identified, the highest of which was participation in ongoing mass action to force the government to deliver on its promises

In the 1998 survey this proportion declined significantly to 53%. These results indicate that workers are less ready to take to the streets over political issues and are beginning to rely more on Parliament and their representatives. In a sense, there is a beginning of a process of 'normalisation' with action continuing around workplace issues but a decline in willingness to undertake mass action over political issues

Conclusion

The research has shown once again that there is a consistency and persistence of a commitment to participatory democracy in the workplace and an expectation that this will take place in the parliamentary arena as well.

COSATU membership continues to be represented through strong shopfloor structures. Their commitment to the ANC

as part of the Tripartite Alliance, remains largely unchanged

If the new government elected in 1999 fails to deliver on workers' demands, workers are less likely than in 1994 to resort to ongoing mass action to force the government to meet its electoral promises. A growing number of workers seem to be accepting parliament as a central arena for their political aspirations. ★

Acknowledgement

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