Chapter 5

Eyes on the Ground: Fieldworker Observations

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Introduction

The survey of voters on election day (Chapter 4) involved the deployment of fieldworkers to 214 voting stations throughout the country. The fieldworkers[1] themselves were obviously well placed to make first-hand observations of the election process and were therefore asked to complete a short questionnaire during the course of the day. A total of 211 of the fieldworkers completed the questionnaire. The considered responses given throughout the day complement the more transitory perspectives of the voters who were at voting stations for much shorter periods.

Accessibility of Voting Stations

More than half (57%) of the voting stations surveyed were located at schools. A further one-quarter (25°/o) were situated in halls (Table 5.1). In terms of accessibility, three-quarters (76%) of the fieldworkers indicated that their voting stations had been easy to find and more than nine out of ten (92%) said that the voting station had been "clearly marked as a voting station". The mast problematic province appears to have been Mpumalanga, where ten of the 16 fieldworkers deployed indicated that the voting stations had not been easy to find and five (31%) said that they, had not been clearly marked. In contrast, only one of the voting stations surveyed in the Northern Cape and one in the Western Cape had been perceived to be difficult to find. Every one of those surveyed in the Northern Cape and the Northern Province had been clearly marked as a voting station. Although the voters themselves may have been familiar with the territory, it is also important that the observers should have been able to locate voting stations with ease. Clarity and accessibility are factors that can only enhance the effectiveness of an election. The IEC appears to have succeeded in this respect in most cases.

The fieldworkers were asked, "What are conditions like inside the voting station?" Seven out of ten (71%) said that conditions were "pleasant". One-quarter (26%) indicated that it had been "too cold", an unsurprising finding given the time of year, and the remaining six (3%) felt that it had been "too hot" inside the voting station. Cold conditions at some stations may thus have impacted on the performance of electoral officials confined to the voting station for the duration of voting, as well as the counting period thereafter. More attention should accordingly be given to the physical comfort of electoral officials during future elections in order to promote a high standard of service to the voting public. The use of tents should be avoided, because of the risk of cold or rainy weather and the effect this might have on voter comfort and administrative efficiency. A milder time of the year such as during the months of April or October would therefore be more suitable far elections.

Opening and Closing Times at Voting Stations

The prescribed duration of voting on election day was the 14-hour period from 07:00 to 21:00. In addition, officials were permitted to accept all the votes of people who were still in the queues at 21:00. At the voting stations surveyed, three-quarters (76%) opened at the official opening time of 07:00. Five per cent opened before 07:00, one in the Northern Province as early as 05:30, and three in other provinces at 06:00. In Mpumalanga, only nine (56%) of the stations surveyed opened on time in comparison with more than 80% in the Eastern Cape, the Western Cape, North West and the Northern Cape. The other stations opened their doors at some time between 07:00 and 10:30, with the exception of one Mpumalanga station that opened for voting only at 20:00.

Eighty-four per cent of the voting stations closed at the prescribed time of 21:00. Eleven per cent closed after 21:00, one in Gauteng as late as 22:30. Of more concern are the five per cent that closed before 21:00, six of these as early as 19:00 or earlier. It needs to be stressed to electoral

officials that even in the event of no queues, it remains the right of the voter to turn up to vote at any time before the official closing time. If the voting station closes prior to this, the voter is effectively disenfranchised.

Table 5.1. Buildings or structures used at the voting stations surveyed, by province

Prov-ince		School	Hall	Tent	Farm	Mobile	Church	Clinic	Other	Total
EC	n	19	4	0	0	1	2	0	3	29
FS	n	10	2	1	3	0	1	0	3	20
GT	n	19	4	5	0	0	0	0	2	30
KZN	n	18	6	0	0	1	0	0	3	28
MP	n	10	4	0	0	1	1	0	0	16
NC	n	2	13	1	3	2	0	1	0	22
NP	n	19	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	22
NW	n	16	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	19
WC	n	8	13	1	1	0	0	0	2	25
Total	n	121	52	8	7	5	4	1	13	211
	%	57	25	4	3	2	2	1	6	100

Length of Voting Queues

The length of queues of people waiting to cast their votes varied widely between voting stations. The fieldworkers were asked to estimate the number of people waiting to vote at various times on election day.

At 09:00, 23 of the 211 stations for which data were collected had nobody waiting in queues to vote (Table 5.2). At the other extreme, two stations in Gauteng (Sandown Hall and Barnato Park High School) had more than 1000 people waiting in queues. One in the Northern Cape (Kuruman: Wrenchville Community Centre) had almost 1 000 people waiting. The national average at that time was 206 voters.

The average gradually decreased throughout the day from 212 at 11:00 to 128 at 15:00 and 76 at 19:00. By 19:00 on the evening of election day, 92 (43%) of the sampled voting stations had no voters queuing to vote, indicative of the successful processing of voters during the course of the day (Table 5.3). A further 80 (38%) had 50 or fewer people waiting in queues. There appeared to be a problem at five of the stations, however, where more than 400 people were still waiting. At one Free State station (Botshabelo Section L), there were still 1 980 people waiting to vote at 19:00, and at the official closing time there were 1985 people still in the queue despite the coldness of the winter night.

The two major causes of lengthy queues were the allocation of too many voters to a particular voting station and inefficient vote processing by electoral officials. Some voters had the misfortune to encounter bath of these factors and, short of resigning themselves to a wait of many hours, could not be blamed for forsaking their opportunity to vote.

Weather

At more than half (56%) of the voting stations surveyed, the fieldworkers described the temperature conditions outside the station as "cold". Since it was mid-winter, this was not surprising, as indicated above. This was the case at most if not all stations in the Northern Province, North West, Gauteng and the Free State. Conversely, all stations in the Western Cape and Eastern Cape experienced "hot" weather conditions.

Table 5.2: Average number of people in voting station queue at 09:00, by province

Prov-ince	0	1-50	51-100	101-200	201-400	401-600	601-800	>800	Total	Average
EC	2	11	4	4	7	0	1	0	29	133
FS	2	4	2	4	4	2	2	0	20	219
GT	3	0	3	3	13	5	1	2	30	404
KZN	2	5	4	5	9	1	2	0	28	203
MP	4	3	1	3	4	1	0	0	16	146
NC	4	9	1	3	4	0	0	1	22	152
NP	2	3	3	8	4	1	0	1	22	180
NW	2	2	3	5	4	2	0	1	19	216
WC	2	12	3	4	3	1	0	0	25	105
Total	**23**	**49**	**24**	**39**	**52**	**13**	**6**	**5**	**211**	**206**

Table 5.3: Average number of people in voting station queue at 19:00, by province

Prov-ince	0	1-50	51-100	101-200	201-400	401-600	>600	Total	Aver-age
EC	11	14	1	2	0	1	0	29	40
FS	11	5	2	0	1	0	1	20	124
GT	11	7	6	3	2	1	0	30	66
KZN	13	10	2	2	0	0	1	28	57
MP	12	1	1	2	0	0	0	16	25
NC	9	10	1	2	0	0	0	22	19
NP	9	12	1	0	0	0	0	22	11
NW	4	11	2	0	1	1	0	19	58
WC	12	10	1	1	1	0	0	25	27
Total	**92**	**80**	**17**	**12**	**5**	**3**	**2**	**211**	**49**

The verdict in the other three provinces (Northern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga) was approximately equally divided between "hot" and "cold" voting stations. No rain was reported at any of the stations during the course of the day. The fact that it was a relatively mild winter day boasted voter turnout, but such weather cannot be expected to occur throughout the winter.

Security Arrangements

Arrangements for the deployment of voting queue marshals, police and army personnel and other security officials were made throughout the country. fieldworkers were asked to count these officials at their particular voting stations at 15:00 on election day.

At 194 stations (92%) there was at least one police official on duty, and at 19 stations (9%) at least one army official was observed. It should be borne in mind that not all such personnel would have been readily visible, some having been assigned to the "outer perimeter" areas of the voting stations. In addition, "other" security personnel were observed to be on duty at 15:00 at 34 stations.

Queue marshals, deployed by the IEC to regulate voter queues and to conduct prechecks on identity documents, were far more prevalent, although obviously less so in mid-afternoon, when some stations had already processed the majority of those who were going to vote that day. At 150 voting stations (71%) there was at least one queue marshal on duty and at 46 (22%) there were four or more marshals in attendance.

Language Distribution of Voters

The fieldworkers were asked to identify the main languages spoken by voters at the voting stations they had been deployed at. By this was meant the languages they heard most frequently spoken by voters. At many stations, more than one language was prevalent.

The pattern that emerged replicated the expected distribution in terms of previous census information. Afrikaans was the most widely spoken language, at almost one-third (31%) of the 211 surveyed stations. At a quarter or just less of the stations, either isiXhosa or isiZulu was spoken. The next most widespread languages were Setswana, Sesotho and English. Most provinces had one language that occurred at nearly every voting station in the province, such as isiXhosa in the Eastern Cape, isiZulu in KwaZulu-Natal, Setswana in North West and Sesotho in the Free State.In other provinces, including Mpumalanga and the Northern Province, no single language was dominant. The policy implication is clearly that officials deployed at any voting station need, between them, to be conversant with the main languages of the region.

Turnout of Ineligible Voters

At four out of five stations (79%) surveyed, the fieldworkers noted that some people were not permitted to vote. Whereas most of the fieldworkers estimated that fewer than 40 people were turned away, in ten per cent of cases more than 40 people had not been allowed to cast their votes. In six instances at least 100 people were turned away. The most serious case was at a voting station in the Eastern Cape (Funulwazi Primary School, Mdantsane) where the fieldworker estimated that approximately 600 people had not been allowed to vote. Pre-election surveys clearly indicated that significant numbers of potential voters had not registered, and the subsequent arrival of ineligible voters was anticipated. In future elections underregistration should be avoided at all costs.

Behaviour at Voting Stations

In order to determine the incidence of disruptive activities at voting stations, the fieldworkers were asked to describe any disturbances they had noticed on election day. Only 16 (8%) said they had observed anything that could be classified as a "disturbance". About half of these fieldworkers mentioned some aspect of the queue such as its length, the impatience of queuers, queue jumping and resentment at elderly and disabled voters being given preference. Inadequate provision of

special votes for such categories of voters should be rectified to avoid this problem in the future. Several fieldworkers mentioned the inefficiency and slowness of electoral officials in doing their work. In a few cases there was a shortage of ballot papers. Another factor mentioned by several fieldworkers was that unregistered voters had attempted to vote and had made a fuss about being prevented from voting.

Table 5.4: Number of voting stations at which each language was dominant, by Province

Language	EC	FS	GT	KN	MP	NC	NP	NW	WC	Total	%
Afrikaans	5	5	8	1	4	19	0	3	21	66	31
isiXhosa	26	5	5	6	0	3	0	1	6	52	25
isiZulu	0	2	16	25	4	2	0	0	0	49	23
Setswana	0	3	8	0	2	3	1	18	0	35	17
Sesotho	0	14	8	0	1	0	5	1	0	29	14
English	1	0	7	3	2	1	0	1	10	25	12
Sepedi	0	0	5	0	1	0	6	0	0	12	6
isiNdebele	0	0	2	0	5	0	0	1	0	8	4
SiSwati	0	0	1	0	5	0	1	0	0	7	3
Xitsonga	0	0	1	0	0	0	6	0	0	7	3
Tshivenda	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	4	2
Other	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	1

Occasionally, members of political parties had talked loudly or shouted from passing vehicles, thereby intimidating some voters. One fieldworker referred to objections to ink being painted onto the thumbnails of voters. It appears that all of these complaints could be dealt with satisfactorily by better operationalisation of electoral procedures on election day.

When asked what the "biggest problem" experienced at the voting station (Table 5.5) had been, 74 (35%) of the fieldworkers said there had been "no problem", and 23 (11%) did not respond. Among the rest, the most frequently mentioned problems were a shortage of voting materials or facilities (11%) and the arrival of ineligible individuals wanting to vote (11%) (ineligible either because their names were not on the voters' roll at that station or because they had not registered at all). A further seven per cent complained about the length of the voting queues at the stations where they had been deployed. Others mentioned the inefficiency, ignorance and rudeness of the electoral officials (5%) and the ignorance of voters about voting procedures (5%). This was ascribed to the lack of information available to the voting public (4%).

Table 5.5: Problems experienced, by voting stations

Problem	Number	%
No problem	74	35
Inadequate voting materials or facilities	24	11
Unregistered voters or arrival at wrong voting stations	24	11
Queue was too long/too slow/inefficient	15	7
Ignorance/inefficiency/poor behaviour of electoral officials	11	5
Ignorance of voters about procedures	10	5
Lack of information	8	4
Inadequate assistance for elderly/disabled	4	2
Other problems	18	9
No response	23	11
Total	**211**	**100**

The fieldworkers were also asked what most voters did "once they had finished voting". Half (52%) said the voters "left the voting station area", and a further 45% said the voters "waited for their friends or family and then left". Less than three per cent of the fieldworkers said the voters "gathered in groups".

Party and Media Representatives at Voting Stations

The presence of political party and media representatives at voting stations during the course of election day was not as widespread as might have been expected. Even the ANC, the largest political organisation in South Africa, was represented at less than half (43%) of the 211 sampled voting stations. Among the other parties, only the NNP, UDM, DP and IFP sent agents to at most ten per cent of the voting stations. The smaller parties had even less representation. This reflects a lack of resources in political parties, a factor that could reduce the effectiveness of the new South African democratic system. The issue of funding smaller extraparliamentary parties needs to be examined with this in mind.

In addition, some form of media (radio, television and newspaper) representation was observed during the course of the day at only 15% of the voting stations surveyed. This has serious implications for the monitoring of any partisan behaviour on the part of electoral officials. In the absence of party agents or representatives of several different parties, local election officers (LEOs) are more open to the temptation of engineering the election results in favour of a particular party.

The fieldworkers were also asked whether they saw "any political party activities" at the voting stations during the course of election day. An affirmative response to this question would imply a contravention of the Electoral Act, in terms of which parties have to maintain a low profile. Nine per cent of the fieldworkers said they had observed political party activities, two-thirds of these being in the Western Cape. Two fieldworkers (1%) indicated that political party posters had been displayed **inside** the voting area at the stations where they had been deployed, a blatant infringement of the law.

Table 5.6: Party political presence, by voting stations

Party	EC	FS	GT	KN	MP	NC	NP	NW	WC	Total	%
ACDP	0	0	4	1	2	2	0	0	3	12	6
ANC	6	11	23	9	9	14	2	5	11	90	43
AZAPO	1	2	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	6	3
DP	1	2	7	1	1	5	0	1	6	24	11
FA	0	0	4	0	3	1	0	0	0	8	4
FF	0	1	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	5	2
IFP	0	1	8	8	2	0	1	1	0	21	10
NNP	2	4	13	3	5	13	2	0	12	54	26
PAC	2	3	6	2	2	2	0	1	0	18	9
UCDP	0	1	3	0	0	1	0	6	1	12	6
UDM	6	3	14	1	3	2	2	1	2	34	16
Other	**1**	**0**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**2**	**1**

Evaluation of Freeness and Fairness

In the eyes of almost all (96%) the fieldworkers the "election procedures were free and fair" at the voting stations where they spent election day. This was the same level of positive response as that of the voters themselves (Chapter 4). Of the few fieldworkers who gave a negative verdict in this regard, there was no concentration in any particular province. Reasons for pronouncing the negative verdict included the observation that some voters had not registered, that one voting station had been moved without prior notice and that some party workers had "helped" illiterate people to vote for parties not necessarily of their choice. Others said that ballot papers had run out or that farm workers had been nervous in the presence of electoral officials at some voting stations.

Implications

Although the election appears to have been largely free and fair, three key policy implications emerged from the survey of fieldworkers' observations.

First, an equitable distribution of voters in voting districts is needed to reduce lengthy queues and voter frustration on the day of an election. In particular, greater care needs to be taken in the demarcation of voting districts in densely populated areas.

Second, unambiguous information about the location of registration and voting stations needs to be widely publicised at the local level to avoid confusion and lack of motivation among the electorate. This is of particular importance in remote rural areas, where accessibility and levels of literacy are more likely to be poor. Local newspapers and radio stations could be utilised more effectively for this purpose, and information posters could be displayed prominently at shopping centres and other public places.

Third, more comprehensive training of local electoral officials, well in advance of an election, is essential to enable them to cope effectively with enquiries and logistical hiccups on election day. Clearly, regulations and procedures should be finalised several months before an election - logistical preparations, appointments and training should not be delayed until the last minute.

Note

1 The HSRC commissioned the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (C A S E) to co-ordinate and supervise the fieldwork logistics.