Chapter 6

Assessing the 1999 Election Machinery: Views of Political Parties and Other Stakeholders

RICHARD Humphries

Introduction

Throughout much of the election campaign, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) was never far removed from public controversy over a range of key electoral administration issues. Political parties consistently queried its decisions on issues as diverse as registration requirements, staffing procedures, voter education or the funding of election campaigns. On one controversy - that over the necessity for bar-coded identity documents - the IEC even had to defend its decision before the Constitutional Court, which decision was upheld.

This chapter explores the views of political parties on the IEC and on some characteristic aspects of electoral administration during the 1999 election. Senior officials in a wide range of parties were interviewed on the role of the IEC; they were also asked to consider possible new procedures on key issues, with a view to adapting current procedures and regulations for the 2004 general election. These respondents generally represented their parties on the National Liaison Committee created by the IEC to form a link between the IEC and the political parties. This structure debated key electoral and organisational issues around the 1999 election.

Party Electoral Objectives and the IEC

Given the many controversies around the IEC, political parties were asked to state their objectives in contesting the election and, then, to account for the differences between their objectives and their eventual performance. In many cases, these accounts were couched in terms of the adverse effects of specific decisions by the IEC that, so the parties claimed, affected their performance at the ballot box.

The ANC indicated that it had aimed to improve on its results in 1994, when it obtained 62,65% of the votes on the national ballot, and to restrict the main opposition parties in KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape to less than 50% of votes cast. Both objectives were achieved. However, some ANC officials argued that even though the IEC allowed slow-moving polling booths in the Western Cape to remain open until all voters in the queues had voted, the slow-moving township stations had cost the party crucial votes in the tightly fought provincial election.

The DP had aimed to take over as the largest opposition party and to achieve at least 10% of votes cast. Its goals were "98% achieved"; the primary cause of the shortfall was that many of its supporters had "found it difficult to register" given the requirement for a bar-coded identity document.

The ACDP had aimed to become one of the "top three parties" and to prepare its constituency for the 2000 local government and the 2004 national elections. The first aim was not achieved, owing to alleged "intimidation on the ground". The party did however manage to attract three times as many votes as in 1994, even though 3,5 million fewer voters participated in the election.

In the case of the FA, the aim had been to achieve 7% of the vote. The party acknowledged that this had not been a realistic expectation because the FA had only been formed five months before the election. It nevertheless had two candidates elected to parliament and one to the Gauteng legislature. It claimed to have "done well in some areas".

AZAPO did not achieve its primary goal - that of winning the election. This was attributed to a gross lack of funding, especially relative to the large parties.

The MF achieved its goals "to a certain extent" because, in its view, a great deal of "hard work had been put in". It had aimed at capturing three-quarters of the votes in the Chatsworth-Phoenix area and claimed to have captured 51% of these votes.

SOPA had aimed at making parliament more representative of national sentiment. Despite failing to win a single seat it felt that it had reached its objective of increasing the electorate's awareness of the party and its socialist message. It attributed its failure to make a greater impact to funding difficulties as well as the IEC's failure to settle disputes efficiently.[1]

The UCDP contested the election at national level and in the North West, Gauteng, Northern Cape and Mpumalanga provinces. It won seats in the national assembly and in North West. While largely satisfied with its performance in the election it felt it had been prejudiced by state legal action against its party leader, Lucas Mangope, and by alleged prejudicial treatment from the IEC.

The PAC had hoped to win between 21% and 35% of the vote, thereby becoming the "official black opposition" with about 100 seats in parliament. Its main target provinces were, in order of priority, the Northern Province, North West and the Eastern Cape, followed by Gauteng. It expected to win control of the Northern Province legislature, based on its rapidly expanding membership there. Many chiefs apparently joined the party, pledging the support of their subjects. The party's performance in the 1999 election was however worse than in 1994 and it has only three representatives in the national parliament.

In an attempt to understand the failure to meet its goals, the PAC obtained the services of a policy research company to conduct an organisational audit of the party. A senior party official said many PAC members blamed the IEC for its poor performance, but candidly accepted that there was a need to examine internal party issues.

The NNP entered the election with two goals. The first was to be returned to parliament as the biggest opposition party, maintaining the 20% share of the vote it achieved in 1994; the second was to win more than 50% of the votes in the Western Cape, ensuring outright control of the provincial government. It attributed its failure to meet either of these goals to three factors, none of which concerned the IEC in any way.

The first was the perception amongst its traditional support group that the NNP was responsible for the "negative elements in the new South Africa". The NNP was, so this perception holds, responsible for "selling us out at CODESA"; this perception contrasted strongly with the positive message that the NNP used to contest the election, namely "Make South Africa Work". The second factor relates to the impact of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the NNP's traditional support base. An NNP spokesperson noted that the party underestimated the TRC's impact on the credibility of the party, further adding to the "perceptions of betrayal".

The third factor identified by the respondent was a feeling among "well-off whites" that the NNP "no longer looks after us". Accordingly, many former NNP voters switched to supporting the DP, attracted by its "Fight Back" slogan. However, increasing Afrikaner support for the DP did not mean the political liberalisation of Afrikaners, but a tactical decision about how best to oppose the ANC government.

Critical Issues in the 1999 Election

Against the background above, party officials were asked for their views and opinions on critical electoral administration issues with a view to informing IEC policy in future elections. The critical issues were the following: IEC functioning in general, IEC staff recruitment, discretion of electoral officers, voter registration, voting district demarcation, voter education, and political party funding. The views of the party officials on these issues are complemented by the perspectives of selected other interviewees, including some IEC officials at local and provincial level, on the same issues.

IEC Functioning in General

During much of the election campaign, various aspects of the IEC's performance were constantly addressed in the media or commented upon by political parties. The general thrust of evaluations of

the IEC by respondents from political parties was highly positive. Thus the MF said the EEC had done "their very best to see that the entire process went well"; the FA said that the IEC had "done a splendid job" and "tried to keep abreast" of all developments; and the ANC said the EEC had been "disadvantaged from the beginning by the tight time frames" around particular components of the election schedule. For its part, the NNP felt IEC officials, at a national level, were "very approachable". In general, the 1999 election was much more free and fair although "logistically, exponentially more difficult to run" than the 1994 election, according to the DP. Many respondents from the different political parties repeated this theme.

The response of a senior Gauteng NNP official, who was also involved in the 1994 election, is pertinent. He said he concentrated on setting procedures in place to prevent a recurrence of the estimated three million fraudulent votes the NNP believed had been cast in 1994. Various procedures were therefore agreed upon with fellow opposition parties in Gauteng but little evidence could be found to suggest that vote rigging had occurred on a systematic basis during the 1999 election. If any did, they were isolated incidents.

However, two factors - that of the independence of the IEC, both at a national level and amongst its staff, and communication within the IEC - emerged in many interviews as problematic. Most parties seemed to suggest that while they were generally happy with the way the EEC conducted the election at a national, provincial and local level, interaction between these levels and between these levels and political parties caused concern.

The issue of the IEC's independence emphasised two aspects: its almost corporate nature and its employment of staff. The EEC's corporate nature was cited by parties mainly with respect to its budget and its relationship with the Department of Home Affairs.

AZAPO, for example, suggested that the EEC should receive its funding directly from parliament - and not from the Department of Finance/State Expenditure, through parliament, as is the case with government departments. This would ensure that the IEC is not subject to the management of any government department. It would also facilitate an independent and critical approach to the election process. This view was supported by the PAC, which argued that "elections were a constitutional matter and not a policy issue". This was especially so given that democracy in the country was in its infancy - "it needs nourishment, like a baby". The PAC also argued that the IEC commissioners were "party-political appointees under the guise of government appointees". The party proposed that they be appointed by the Constitutional Court and not by the president.

The second aspect that was emphasised in respect of independence was the appointment of IEC functionaries. Virtually all parties complained that they could detect a partisanship among some IEC officials. The ANC, for example, complained of a former IFP mayor being appointed as a local electoral officer (LEO) and another IFP "strongman" who said that he would "not accept any party agents" at a particular voting station. Only after intervention by senior ANC officials did the person back down. The UDM also pointed to cases where LEOs "wanted their own way" on election day but were stopped by party agents or higher IEC structures.

Similarly, AZAPO complained that the EEC had sought volunteers from ANC-aligned structures such as SADTU and was thus biased in favour of the ruling party. The FA indicated that some IEC officials in the Northern Province were affiliated to parties and that the appointment of such people should be avoided. Given the circumstances, the newness of the voters' roll and the lack of experience amongst officials, AZAPO expressed the view that the IEC "did not do badly" although it was working amongst ANC "sharks". The PAC argued that even relying on town clerks as LEOs allowed distinct political preferences to impact on the election. The PAC respondent argued that since the majority of town councils were controlled by the ANC, town clerks would have "a particular allegiance". It claimed that the majority of LEOs "came from the ruling party" and that "town clerks are direct activists of political parties which leads to the direct manipulation of events".

It proposed that to combat any biases, IEC staff should be recruited by an independent agency at provincial and local level; this agency should then make recommendations to the IEC on employment issues. This step would, it argued, "balance the scales". However, some other parties said they had no problems with the recruitment of qualified staff from the civil service and local authorities.

On the issue of communication between the national IEC office in Pretoria and lower levels, many respondents said it had been rather poor, leading to confusion in the implementation of policy decisions. Communication between the IEC and political parties was also seen as less than optimal and more regular meetings were suggested for the next election period.

For example the NNP, UDM and PAC all specifically mentioned that decisions taken by the National Liaison Committee - which consisted of senior IEC officials and representatives of all political parties - were either slow in filtering down to provincial and local electoral officials or were countermanded and re-discussed in some cases. The UDM remarked that, as a result, its own provincial officials did not receive the instructions or guidelines that they were supposed to, following decisions taken at the national level. The party did however note that this apparent lack of communication between IEC national and provincial structures might have been the result of the limited time frame for the election and/or the result of the failure of some IEC officials to cope with the pressures of the job. The UDM argued that while the overwhelming majority of IEC officials could be said to have performed well, "the remaining 20%" did not do so. Did this also not reflect perhaps a lack of training for these officials, it asked. The PAC remarked that the "left hand of the IEC did not seem to know what the right hand was doing".

Similarly, the IEC was perceived by ECCO- the Electoral Code of Conduct Observer Mission (KwaZulu-Natal) - to be a "top-down" structure in which last-minute changes to the voting regulations could not be adequately communicated. ECCOcomplained that IEC Conflict Management Committee meetings were scheduled at short notice and that it was not possible for ECCOto attend these.

Some respondents pointed to very specific issues in voting stations as reflecting the poor communication within the IEC. One party (ACDP) stated that in the Northern Province and KwaZulu-Natal (Kokstad-Matatiele region) ballot boxes were not sealed as required. Also, stickers depicting Thabo Mbeki had been put onto persons waiting in a queue, without any action being taken by the LEO. Although these do reflect very localised station management issues, it is important that the IEC puts in place procedures for future elections which convincingly undercut the possibility of such incidents. .

Many parties suggested that in the next election, officials with experience and legal knowledge should be appointed in order to improve all-round management. The ANC and DP indicated that training was inadequate and that party agents had often had to enlighten some presiding officers (POs) over issues such as the differences between a provisional and a final voters' roll. Many parties suggested that these issues arose because of the ways in which the IEC had recruited staff, an issue to which we now turn.

IEC Staff Recruitment

The saga of recruitment of registration officials and their subsequent abandonment by the IEC (due to budget constraints) coloured the experience of the election for many political parties and support organisations.. These organisations. found it difficult to reconcile the IEC's opulence in terms of information technology and its various presentations with its cries of poverty, particularly when it came to paying local volunteers or providing them with refreshments on election day.

Prior to the first registration period in November 1998, the IEC was told to recruit staff on the basis of a R270 per day salary. It was subsequently announced that the budget would not cover such salaries and that volunteers should be sought. Most of the previous recruits thus withdrew and volunteers were recruited, but not on merit, A total of 3 500 volunteers were required in the Durban Metro area and most were teachers, city council workers or unemployed people. A problem with this system was the lack of hold that the IEC had over the volunteers. People who were not being paid generally displayed little accountability.

Ideally, highly qualified individuals with knowledge and experience of legal matters should be appointed as POs. School principals were seen to be good potential candidates for such a role. If they could not be paid, they should at least have been given incentives in the form of time off for time worked.

One local IEC official who took a long-term perspective used her discretion to compile a brief performance appraisal of each official employed; this will be used to recall and reposition existing capacity during the forthcoming local government election. She bemoaned the fact that the IEC did not require this of her, suggesting that far as long as the IEC fails to retain existing capacity it will not become a "learning organisation". It will be condemned to retrain staff during every election.

Another IEC provincial official noted that the pressure to employ unemployed persons perhaps contributed to the difficulties experienced in some voting stations on election day. He argued that such persons were often ill equipped to deal with crises; perhaps, too, he noted, they did also not receive enough training in voting station management.

The KwaZulu-Natal Violence Monitoring Project (VMP) expressed the view that there should be "more care in selecting people" for high positions in the IEC. It mentioned cases where known supporters or sympathisers of particular parties were appointed as electoral officers at high levels, even to the IEC itself. Appointees who were perceived to be "neutral" were in some cases "vetoed" by the IFP. A former IFP mayor of Esikhawini was appointed LEO in spite of protests by other parties. Similarly a KwaZulu-Natal MEC (IFP member) and the close relative of an IFP chief were appointed to high IEC positions in KwaZulu-Natal. The response given to complainants was that similar appointments were made in other provinces in favour of other parties and this was perceived to be "balancing things out".

It was suggested by the VMP that professionals or people involved in the church should be appointed to IEC posts and that in "hot spots" external people should be appointed, although not at lower levels. There should be wider consultation with organisations. such as the VMP in order to identify suitable "unaligned" people.

Discretion of Electoral Officers

Ongoing tension among election staff resulted from the need to observe the letter of the regulations (replete with last-minute changes, misconceptions etc.) as opposed to the limits on their discretion in ensuring that the intent of the regulations was met. Some staff who were inexperienced in the handling of elections and cognisant of the importance of their role were often reluctant to use their discretion when interpreting incomplete and even confusing regulations for guidance.

The IEC (Durban) felt that the roles at different levels had been poorly defined, leading to a lack of knowledge about responsibilities and a lack of accountability on the part of officials. On the other hand, the autonomy and flexibility exercised by some officials had been a positive feature. it would be vital to define roles and responsibilities more clearly next time, the official asserted. The IEC urged that the skills and experience gained in the 1999 election be maintained so as not to have to start from scratch next time. The benefit of keeping on a few well-qualified staff would far outweigh the cost of retraining. Lessons learnt should not be lost.

Additionally, provincial LEOs, who were much more in touch with situations at the grassroots, were insufficiently empowered to make decisions. An example of this was in KwaZulu-Natal, where provincial LEOs were not permitted to centralise counting stations in the face of local political friction or lack of security. Counting was centralised anyway, in order to prevent problems.

Voter Registration

While there was general acceptance of the need for a voters' roll and thus the registration of voters, the parties, in general, were critical of aspects of the registration process, often identifying sectors of the electorate they felt had been prejudiced by the process. Although the entire voting process was more complicated and burdensome compared to 1994, they acknowledged that the new process limited the extent of the electoral fraud in the founding election. And, after three registration periods, a substantial number of South Africans had been able to register, thereby providing a base upon which registration of voters could be built for the 2000 local government election or the 2004 national election.

In the opinion of some respondents the benefits of registration were however undermined by the insistence on bar-coded identity documents and by last-minute changes to the electoral regulations which allowed voters to vote "as long as their names were on the voters' roll". The latter was seen as undermining the voters' roll (particularly at local level) and as running against the spirit of the registration process.

The FA, for example, while supportive of the need for registration, felt that the time allocated for the process had been inadequate. Other smaller parties also supported the registration requirement - particularly the PAC, ACDP, SOPA and UCDP. The PAC argued that since an estimated four million persons did not register, it was clear that these potential voters did not understand the significance of registration and the "power of the vote". The rural poor, in particular, did not understand the need to register.

The UDM argued that while the insistence on bar-coded identity documents was the "best principle", South Africa was not ready for such a system. Neither was the IEC nor the Department of Home Affairs prepared for the implications of implementing the system. The UDM argued that "thousands" of potential voters in the Eastern Cape - which was one of its support bases - had been excluded from voting as a result of the insistence on bar-coded identity documents. Also, the time table envisaged by the IEC for registration kept changing in response to various political, budgetary and practical issues. The UDM noted that the IEC's original intention of holding an on-going registration period from October 1998 to February 1999 was abandoned as a result of budget disputes between the IEC and the government. The party said the IEC then attempted to justify a once-off three-day registration period with the comment that "if voters can vote on one day, why can they not register over a single three-day period?" The UDM and other parties opposed this suggestion; they did however feel vindicated by the IEC's later decision to hold two further registration periods following very low registration rates in the first period. The UDM said it appeared that the IEC had accepted that a free and fair election could not be conducted on the basis of one registration period alone.

The Electoral Institute of South Africa (EISA) noted two points about the insistence on a bar-coded identity document. The first was that the legal aspect of the conflict - through applications to various levels of the judicial system - established a political and legal precedent for future applications over IEC decisions. This notwithstanding, EISA argued that some of the parties challenging the IEC did perhaps prejudice their electoral performance, in that their supporters probably anticipated a successful outcome to the legal challenge.

The legal challenges centred an the IEC's compelling South African citizens with the old identity document to subject themselves to the "unnecessary" bureaucratic hurdle of obtaining an updated form of identification conducive to verification by newer information technology systems; the parties argued that this, prima facie, prejudiced older citizens without bar-coded identity documents. The NNP, for example, argued that the purpose of registration was to get persons onto a voters' roll and "not to exclude persons". One party official estimated that about two million persons had been unable to register, even though they had been in possession of valid identity documents. The party also said clarity was needed on the IEC's use of the figure of 22 million "potential voters", The ACDP expressed the view that the acceptance of only bar-coded identity documents for registration was "wrong" in that it failed to restrict registration to the citizenry or to ensure the optimal registration of citizens. It alleged that "about one million illegal identity documents had been issued to non-South African citizens" on the basis of bribes of between R300 and R500 each.

Respondents from a range of parties cited sectors of the voting public who they felt were prejudiced by the registration process. AZAPO felt that the registration process "was not up to scratch", especially among disabled black voters. It argued that such persons were not aware of the IEC's special arrangements to register the disabled at their homes. The FA and DP indicated that many voters, especially pensioners, had not registered because of the lengthy queues at regional offices of the Department of Home Affairs. The MF said some registration points had not opened at all or opened for only a part of the weekends set aside for registration by the IEC. In addition the poor, pensioners and the unemployed who were unable or unwilling to pay for photographs or the

transport costs associated with obtaining an identity document, were further prejudiced by the requirement: Clearly, respondents from various political parties did not distinguish between costs compelled by the Department of Home Affairs and those compelled by IEC processes. The FA felt strongly that voters should not have incurred any costs for registration.

The MF felt that many voters had not understood the need for registration or the procedures for registering. They suggested that greater motivation should have occurred and more information been made available to the average voter. Respondents from various parties pointed out that resistance to the bar-coded identity document was heightened by its being seen as "unusable" beyond the election - it did not contain particulars on drivers' licenses or marital status, as did the old documents.

All political parties suggested amendments to the registration process. These suggestions covered, in particular, the roles of the IEC, the Department of Home Affairs and local authorities. All political parties seemed to agree that voter registration should be an on-going process. Some presented specific ideas.

The FA, and other parties; suggested that whenever a new municipal services account was opened or transferred, the particulars of the members of the relevant household should be re-registered in the voting district to which they had moved. It was painted out that the average voter visits a local authority structure on a regular basis. The UDM noted that local authority involvement in the up-dating process would ensure that local authorities maintained interest in the election process.

The PAC argued that a house-to-house registration campaign was needed to get eligible voters onto the roll; such a campaign could be undertaken in co-operation with local authorities: An NNP respondent noted that such campaigns had been held once every ten years in apartheid South Africa; they were paid for and organised by the former Department of Home Affairs. Consideration should be given to repeating these processes.

Another NNP respondent suggested that it was essential to add the addresses of voters to the roll as "a roll without addresses is just as good as having no roll". The respondent noted that the IEC had argued that to insist on addresses would have disadvantaged persons from informal settlements where no physical addresses existed. While the NNP had some sympathy with this argument, it also pointed out that insistence on addresses might have invited people to register with false addresses. The NNP had uncovered such fraud in Centurion, for example.

The NNP also suggested that the voters' roll (with addresses) should be made available to political parties on the day that an election date is promulgated by the president. Such information on the voters' roll would enable political parties to canvass persons directly. Supplementary rolls could be made available depending on the extent of further registrations.

The UDM, for its part, suggested that the Department of Home Affairs should return to the system whereby citizens had to notify the department of changes of address; this would automatically lead to the updating of the voters' roll.

Local election officials had contradictory points of view on the issue. Some officials concurred with the need for on-going registration while others did not. One IEC official in Durban saw the registration process as good preparation for election logistics, as well as being a means of creating "sustained public awareness" of the election. However, continuous registration for the 1995/1996 local government election did not increase public awareness and was more expensive than expected.

Another IEC respondent from the Durban metropolitan area felt that door-to-door registrations could not be as strictly controlled as those undertaken at specific registration points.

The Violence Monitoring Project (VMP) based in KwaZulu-Natal argued that the registration process during the 1999 election was a major improvement over that of the 1994 election. Nevertheless, it came across a number of irregularities in the voter registration process. These included omission of names of voters on a roll at Paulpietersburg, and a local chief in Eshowe telling some voters to register "elsewhere". It also noted that many voters had not collected their identity documents from the Department of Home Affairs and that others had not known how to check whether their names had been included an the voters' roll. It suggested that voters' rolls be scrutinised more comprehensively and with more active participation by political parties. This would also help to

ensure impartiality.

According to the SAPS, the three registration periods between November 1998 and March 1999 entailed "stress on the overtime budget" and the cessation of normal anti-crime operations. The SAPS had also not been a participant in decisions about registration dates, nor had it been given sufficient notice of dates decided upon by the IEC. An SAPS spokesperson said the SAPS would prefer either a continuous registration process or one conducted on a house-to-house basis since these methods would avoid security risks at specific registration points. However, the respondent noted that the repeated registration periods served as a good preparation for SAPS participation on election day itself.

Voting District Demarcation

Most parties seem, in general, to have had few negative comments about the structural issues of demarcation. Some did raise specific issues, though.

The FF, for example, complimented the IEC on the relative simplicity of the principle for voter allocation per voting station: a maximum of 3 500 voters. However, the NNP pointed out that this led to the assumption that these voters would be processed quickly on election day, which assumption proved false when some smaller stations experienced problems in processing voters.

Many local IEC officials objected to the high concentration of voters in some stations. Their appeals for equipment and staff for extra stations went unheeded or were rejected (often on the basis that at a given tempo the numbers could be accommodated). These local officials pointed to a snowball effect in that the larger voting stations were driven to crises by errors compounding each other. For example, the more populous voting districts tended to be located in less developed/serviced areas where less secure tents and less reliable sources of power for lighting and battery charging tended to be used, and where access to telephones tended to be more limited.

Voter Education

Few respondents from political parties commented on voter education undertaken by organisations. other than themselves. Generally they also saw voter education as being the prerogative of institutions other than the IEC.

The UCDP asserted that voter education had been left to IDASA which, it argued, had an interest in the results of the election. More substantial criticism of the process came from one of the organisations. that monitored the IEC during the election. It perceived the voter education process and infrastructure as being "fraught" with nepotism and corruption. Contracts were apparently awarded entirely at the discretion of provincial officials and compliance with these contracts was not adequately monitored.

Most agencies and parties felt that there was not enough voter education during the pre-election period. The PAC noted that when the IEC was faced with the need to cut its budget, voter education programmes were "cut out almost entirely". It also felt that voter education had been better implemented in the 1994 election. AZAPO felt that inadequate funding was not an excuse for the lack of accessible voter education material for illiterate, rural voters. The MF complained that voter education was done at the "eleventh hour" and that parties did not have time to do much of their own voter education.

The ACDP felt that organisations. supportive of the ANC had dominated "voter education", which may have biased education in favour of the ANC. An example cited by the UCDP was the omission of its name and symbol from mock ballot papers used in training. The UCDP felt this negatively influenced voting for the party among voters who had received voter education.[2] The UDM noted that information conveyed in IEC voter education manuals was sometimes wrong or did not reflect late changes.

One local IEC official stated that, according to information the IEC received, television was the medium that made the greatest impact on voter education. AZAPO noted, on this point, that radio and television programmes had been of a good quality but that urban and literate voters benefited

more than rural and illiterate voters.

Opinions on voter education were often tinged by the perceived needs of the different constituencies targeted by different political parties, i.e. urban or rural, black or white, poor or rich, literate or illiterate etc. However, the UDM noted that the political literacy of South African voters was often underestimated in the debate on voter education; it pointed to the low level of spoilt votes as proof of this.

Suggestions by respondents for improved voter education often hinged on the need to establish on-going democracy education courses; these courses would have to have a broader focus ("why vote?") than the narrow procedural issue ("how to vote") addressed by voter education.

Accordingly, AZAPO urged that a nation-wide state-funded voter education programme take place before the next election. This should include "hands-on practical activities" and radio should be utilised more than television, in view of the greater reach of radio among the electorate. The PAC, which said it preferred democracy education courses over voter education courses, said the IEC should demand sufficient funds to fulfil democracy or voter education and that it "should take the lead in developing a module for voter education". It could then sub-contract NGOs to run courses on its behalf, if it did not have the capacity to do so itself. The UDM felt that voter education was a "basic responsibility" of the IEC. However, it noted that voter education for local authority elections differed from that for the national election. Hence programmes would have to explain the differences between the ward and the proportional representation system used in the local authority elections.

The IEC (Durban) expressed the view that very little voter education took place and that "even the most educated people didn't understand the last-minute changes" regarding special and declaration votes. It recommended that voter education begin much earlier and that election regulations also be determined at an earlier stage. Despite lengthy briefings on changes to election procedures, the last-minute changes were "very confusing". A major problem had been how to convey the implications of the changes to the 11000 staff on duty over the election period.

The VMP argued that elderly people were "most victimised" by the general absence of voter education because they were "less likely than young people to stand up for their rights". In the future, radio should be the main medium for voter education. The concept of the secret vote and procedures for reporting irregularities should receive the greatest attention in voter education courses.

ECCOdistributed posters to clinics, magistrate's offices, police stations and churches throughout KwaZulu-Natal. Their delivery was however hampered by the withdrawal of SASCO bakery from an undertaking to deliver the material; in ECCO's view, this illustrated the level of fear of intimidation in the province before the election.

Political Party Funding

Most parties felt that the current system of funding the election campaigns of parties according to their performance in the previous election needed to be reviewed. Currently only parties represented in parliament receive funding and the amount is determined by the relative strength of the party in parliament.

Most parties were of the opinion that state funding should be allocated more equitably. Alternatively some suggested that in the absence of more equitable arrangements state funding of parties should cease. However, respondents from the smaller parties represented in parliament noted that state allocations were indispensable for their survival. The FF indicated that had it not been for parliamentary funding, "we would not have been able to run an election"

While state funding may equip smaller parliamentary parties to survive between elections, it might also indirectly serve to entrench existing patterns of support. SOPA, for example, claimed that state funding ensured the replication of the apartheid era support patterns and the maintenance by established parties of their privileged positions. The UCDP suggested that elections were intended to determine levels of popular support. Hence the allocation of state funding based on seats held in

parliament assumed that levels of support were known, which assumption renders elections unnecessary. Again, the PAC proposed that funding to parties should proceed on an equal basis, once an election date has been promulgated.

Respondents from most parties nevertheless expressed the view that state funding should not go to parties farmed shortly before an election. This would serve to discourage "fly-by-nights", the proliferation of small parties, the dilution of available funding and the "logistical nightmare" of printing thick ballot papers.

Suggested alternatives to the current policy included the abolition of state funding, the development of more equitable "objective" criteria, equaling for all contestants or a substantial minimum amount. The DP, for example, argued that parties could make submissions to a commission that could determine more appropriate levels of funding for each party. It suggested that funding be based on a 40:60 ratio of currently held seats versus current party support level as shown by opinion polls.

The IFP suggested that "blanket funding" be provided to all parties with a proven support base. Proof of support could be gauged from the signed-up party membership or the number of supporters' signatures collected. Although most parties suggested that the funding discrepancy should be reduced, others thought that funding for parties should be equalised as all parties were "working for the same goal".

AZAPO indicated that it would be preferable to withdraw all parliamentary funding to parties. Additionally, foreign funding for South African political parties should not be allowed. Funds should be raised internally by each party through its own organisational structures. A compromise, in the event of funding being provided, would be for all parties older than five years to be permitted to access parliamentary funding upon the submission of a minimum of 10 000 signatures of support. AZAPO expressed the view that the current system resulted in elections being "run for the rich" only.

Three parties (SOPA, the UCDP and DP) expressed similar views over the need for transparency over sources of funding. The DP felt that foreign funding should be disclosed, referring to the role of the Federal Electoral Commission in the USA which permits only individual donations to a political party and limits corporate funding. However, the PAC argued that foreign funding to political parties was an internal matter; similarly the NNP said corporate funding was a private issue.

The NNP proposed that party funding should not promote the proliferation of political parties in parliament. It pointed to Italy where political parties had proliferated, resulting in an unstable national government. Rather, it proposed, a minimum number of votes should be required to qualify for funding; if this was deemed unsuitable, then a larger deposit could be asked of parties for registration and participation in an election. "Fly-by-night" political parties had to be eliminated as far as possible, it argued. Parties had to pay a deposit of R100 000 to contest the national election and R20 000 to contest the provincial election.

This point was also picked up by the UDM. It did however point out that restricting funding to parties already represented in parliament was tantamount to "feeding the fed". If a middle road could not be found, then political funding should be scrapped entirely.

The ACDP and pointed out what they perceived as injustices in the present system. The ACDP claimed that the ANC had spent R2 million on posters alone, out of a total budget of R32 million, although it had received a grant of R660 000 only. In contrast, SOPAwas given a grant of R200 000, of which R160 000 was needed as a deposit for registration, which was forfeited when the party failed to win a seat.

The ANC argued that parliamentary funding was disbursed too early in the campaign. The IEC required that 60% of funds be used during 1998, leaving relatively little for the final months of the election campaign. Respondents from the ANC expressed divergent views about whether extra-parliamentary parties should receive funding for their election campaigns. Some interviewees supported such funding; others opposed it unless a broad indication of widespread support far the party could be illustrated.

The very divergent views expressed by political parties towards the issue of state funding for political parties suggest that the IEC should review policy options on this issue in collaboration with the political parties and the national legislature.

Conclusion

Elections are by nature divisive events, pitting contending parties and policies against one another. One striking element of this review of the attitudes of political parties is that all political parties voiced criticism about one or other aspect of the election and the IEC's handling of the election. A second striking element is that the IEC, despite these criticisms, was generally seen to have "done a good job under the circumstances". This positive sentiment should motivate the IEC to consider the views of political parties and incorporate them into its preparation for the 2004 general election.

Another striking element is the extent to which the large number of smaller parties often expressed quite vehement criticism of the environment in which they had to compete for votes, for example inequitable state funding of smaller parties, inefficient voter registration and perceived political biases amongst electoral officials. It is quite possible that much of their criticism comes from having their expectations dashed, even though they arguably went into the election with inflated expectations about their electoral strength. Nevertheless, their views should not be dismissed simply because they performed badly in the election; their criticisms should also be evaluated and digested by the IEC alongside those made by the more established and larger parties.

Notes

1 AZAPO complained that SOPA's emblem resembled its own too closely and appealed to the IEC to prevent SOPAfrom using it. SOPAresponded, in part, by not campaigning with the emblem. SOPAfelt that the failure of the IEC to inform SOPAthat AZAPO's complaint had been rejected, prejudiced its electoral performance.

2 A question needs to be raised as to the appropriateness of using workshops for "mass" education.