

## Chapter 7

### Voting in Action: Focus Group and Workshop Findings

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#### Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the election evaluation study based on workshops and focus group discussions held throughout South Africa during July 1999. The purpose of the workshops and focus group discussions was to assess the voting public's perception of the effectiveness of the election process, focusing on voter education, voter registration, electioneering, voting and vote counting.

A workshop was held in each of the nine provinces. In addition, focus group discussions were held in Soweto (Gauteng), Crossroads (Cape Town), Umsinga (KwaZulu-Natal) and Ikageng (North West).

Local election observers, election monitors, voters and non-voters, representatives of church, women and youth organisations, officials of the Independent Electoral Commission and representatives of community based organisations participated in the workshops. In contrast, the focus groups were homogeneous groups of individuals.

The participants revealed rich insights, knowledge and expertise, which were vital for the post-election evaluation project. The richness of their contribution could be ascribed to their different involvement in the election process - some had been involved in voter education and others had been independent monitors; some were from the 'elite' segment of society (having substantial knowledge of the election process and playing some role before or after election day) and others were merely voters.

The workshop and focus group discussions centred on experiences during the election period. More particularly, the participants were asked to identify successes and problems in a number of focal areas and to make recommendations for improvements. This chapter weaves together issues raised in 13 shorter workshop or focus group reports. The chapter covers the following:

- Voter education
- Voter registration
- Electioneering
- Efficiency and effectiveness of the election
- Vote counting
- Expected and real election results
- Major successes

#### Voter Education

Voter education is critical in educating the electorate about the importance of voting and voting procedures. After all, an informed electorate is an important pillar in the promotion and consolidation of democracy.

There appeared to be variations in the nature of, and also the extent to which voter education was conducted during the 1999 election. For example, the Soweto focus group revealed that voters were exposed to voter education of various types. Several methods were used to educate people about

voting: television, drama, announcements by teachers, and workshops by church groups. Indeed, voter education on television occurred so frequently that it frustrated a young Soweto voter:

They [voter education adverts] were too monotonous. While we were watching this interesting story then boom, the advertisement about voter education when you really don't want to listen to that, but not all the times so that was boring and it was just too much. (Gauteng focus group.)

In almost all provinces there were complaints from workshop participants that voter education only took place during the two weeks directly before election day. However, others indicated that voter education started earlier, although the resources allocated for voter education were inadequate.

Another frequent complaint was that those conducting voter education 'did not have all the information' and 'were not adequately trained' (Eastern Cape workshop). Others indicated that there was no transport to get people to the workshops in rural areas, and that the transport did not cater for people with disabilities.

The role of the media in the promotion of voter education was questioned. For example, an Eastern Cape participant argued that the media could not provide fair, reliable and objective information about the voting process. The endorsement of certain political parties by certain media representatives further convinced some voters that the media did not provide objective information to the electorate.

Some focus group participants indicated that voter education did not receive priority in 1999. A KwaZulu-Natal workshop participant concurred: 'In the 1994 elections there was an intensive kind of voter education. This year there was that misconception that people now understand ... but the elections that we had are totally different from what we have seen in 1994.'

The Umsinga focus group generally confirmed lack of voter education in that area. When asked whether voter education took place, one participant said, 'None were organised. People had to find out for themselves.' According to another participant, '[t]here was no voter education'.

Several other rural districts similar to Umsinga relied on the radio for voter education, or on information from political parties, tribal chiefs and family members. Such information could hardly be neutral.

Apparently more urban than rural areas were reached by voter education. In the words of a female workshop participant in Mpumalanga, '[voter educators] only concentrated here on the urban areas ... [where] they've got access to the media and everything'.

Some voter education trainers at the workshops and focus group discussions alleged that the money allocated for training was far too little and in some instances amounted to 'exploitation of trainers to do what the IEC ought to do' (Soweto focus group). Some IEC officials conceded that few resources were allocated for voter education.

However, some participants found the voter education useful. An election observer participating in the Mpumalanga workshop stated the following: 'To start with they introduced us to ballot papers and how to vote. I mean how to differentiate between the leaders and how to vote. They told us to be careful not to spoil ballot papers.'

Given the limited time and inadequate resources for voter education, it is not surprising that voter education did not take place throughout the country. Moreover, in some areas where voter education did take place, voter apathy prevailed. Some of the voter educators were alarmed at the lack of interest among young people in attending voter education workshops. This was confirmed by the following citations from the Mpumalanga workshop:

If you organise voter education, most of the youth have a bad attitude about this ... They used to resent us. I don't know why.

Youth have got a bad attitude ... We tried our best ... but people, they don't show up.

An election observer participating in the KwaZulu-Natal workshop remarked as follows:

From what we observed I think [voter education] was implemented but not actually enough. Because, for instance there was an assumption that only the black people needed it. We also experienced a need amongst white voters. They also need to be educated around voter education.

Gauteng workshop participants also felt that voter education was not conducted widely and effectively. In Evaton, for example, no voter education was apparently conducted. In addition, even though voter education was conducted in, for example, Soweto (Diepkloof) and Alexandra, not all areas there were covered. Other key problems are clear from the following citations:

Poor response rate among the youth and elderly in some areas with regard to voter education workshops. (Northern Cape workshop.)

Expected the IEC to run voter education because of its national infrastructure. (Northern Province workshop.)

The IEC allocated insufficient funds for voter education. (Soweto focus group.)

Some voter education organisations. were partisan. (KwaZulu-Natal workshop.)

Some voter educators represented the views of government which did not deliver on its promises. (Western Cape workshop.)

Material used during the voter education was mainly written in English, and some people in the Northern Cape and Western Cape felt more could have

been done to translate voter education material into Afrikaans. (Northern Cape workshop.)

Voter education was only started in March 1999. (Gauteng workshop.)

Some segments of society did not understand why, unlike the 1994 election, they were required to register as voters. Young people showed reluctance to register; some claimed they did not see any benefit in registration. Poor attendance could also be attributed to the fact that most second-time voters had attended voter education in 1994 and thus believed that in 1999 voter education was more a matter of giving information than educating people. Some eligible voters may have equated voter education with choosing whom to vote for. Thus, as many voters had already made up their minds as to whom to vote for, they did not see fit to attend voter education. Evidence from the workshop and focus group discussions suggests that voter education was not as highly prioritised as it was in 1994. The majority of focus group and workshop participants underscored the importance of voter education.

### **Voter Registration - Efficient? Improvements?**

There were three rounds of registration in South Africa to ensure that the largest possible number of eligible voters would be able to vote on 2 June 1999. In general, there was wide-spread acknowledgement of the effort and energy devoted to getting a maximum number of people to register. With a few exceptions, there was consensus that, on the whole, voter registration went remarkably well. In the Western Cape, Northern Province, North West and Mpumalanga, for example, workshop participants indicated that house-to-house visits and mobile registration stations were used to mobilise people to register

The following problems arose from voter registration:

- The names of some people who had registered did not appear on the voters' roll. In addition, some living people were declared 'dead' while the names of some deceased persons appeared on lists in North West.
- In North West, family members living in the same household were registered at two or three different voting stations.

- There was concern about the role of media bias during voter registration. The IEC, however, did embark on an information campaign towards the middle of May 1999 (Eastern Cape and North West workshop).
- Some voting stations had a far greater number of people registered than others, which created several problems on election day (Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal workshop).
- There were delays in getting identity documents from the Department of Home Affairs (Eastern Cape workshop).
- Confusion and lack of understanding among some eligible voters as to why they should register led to others failing to register. It appears as if some people might have seen registration as an inconvenience and not worth pursuing (Mpumalanga workshop).
- Some voters took the mobile registration vehicles to be also their designated voting stations. Others did not know the location of their voting station on election day and spent half the day looking for 'the right station' (North West workshop).
- Some voters assumed that they would be allowed to vote even if they had not registered (Mpumalanga and Eastern Cape workshop).

Some workshop participants suggested that the Department of Home Affairs should register people automatically on the voters' roll when they turn 18 years.

The exclusion of non-citizens was raised as another problem in Gauteng and the Western Cape. It was based on the argument that since non-citizens were allowed to vote in 1994, they should have been allowed to vote again in 1999. A few participants indicated that, had they been informed of their exclusion in time, they could have made arrangements to apply for South African citizenship.

Registration was easy compared to the verification process. For example, an Eastern Cape woman said it was easy to go and register but that to check up on whether her name appeared on the voters' roll was extremely difficult: 'To try and get into the computer [Internet] to check if your name was on the list was a nightmare. It was so jammed.' She suggested that there should be more time between registration and the election so those mistakes could be corrected in time. Several other participants echoed this sentiment.

Questions around designated registration days were also raised. In the Eastern Cape, members of the community suggested that one of the registration days should have been a public holiday to match the fact that election day was a public holiday and to emphasise the importance of registration. (Registration was designated for weekends, including Fridays.)

The role of the media in promoting registration was also discussed. An Eastern Cape workshop participant asserted that the media had not got to the 'morale of the people ... We needed to boost their morale about the election', and put energy and excitement into the election. Another Eastern Cape workshop participant said this was particularly important in respect of the youth and added that 'door-to-door contact was important' during voter registration.

Voter registration was little criticised in KwaZulu-Natal, the Western Cape and Mpumalanga. The major concern appeared to be with the motivation of people (especially young people) to register rather than with voter registration itself. This was worded as follows by a KwaZulu-Natal election observer:

To me [registration] was done in a way that was satisfying. Even though initially it was a bit of a problem with regard to people who were not actually keen to go and register, for example, in our own organisation many graduates were reluctant to go and register. But that was based on the issues that made it politically important ... but after the Youth Commission and some youth structures were engaged in the course of the registration and making a whole event of the whole election process [it improved].

Those who chose not to register did so for various reasons. A member of a Mpumalanga organisation for unemployed graduates related lack of enthusiasm to register to disillusionment and 'political disengagement': 'They promised us we were going to get jobs, and then, afterwards, we never got any - I mean people never get any jobs ... so we don't care because even if you go and register, nothing is going to happen for us people.'

Some Mpumalanga workshop participants claimed that a 'rumour' was spread in some areas that sanctions would be imposed on people who did not vote: 'The rumour was that if you don't vote you won't get any job. So after they extended the date people started to go and register. They turned up in big numbers.'

A similar perception occurred in Soweto. One focus group member worded this as follows:

Some of my friends just registered because they did not want to be targeted if they did not want to be targets. There were even some saying that if you do not register you were not going to get a job. You remember the sticker would be on your ID so they would tell if you had no sticker.

However, the alleged 'threat' was thought to have come from some political parties and not from the IEC.

According to another Mpumalanga representative, some people thought that 'even if we don't go and register, they will make some way for us to go and vote'. However, some of those who did not register did so as a way of protesting against the post-1994 government. In the words of one workshop participant in Mpumalanga, 'it's just a way of showing that we are angry with the government ... So [next time] some more people will not go and vote, until the promises are fulfilled.'

Other reasons for not registering to vote can be teased out from the following comments:

The main problem was that most of the IDs arrived very late. (Umsinga focus group.)

It is difficult for young people to get IDs if their parents did not get married or did not register them. (Soweto and Umsinga focus group.)

The voting stations were very far away. And when we got there the [mobile] IEC had already moved to another place. (Eastern Cape workshop.)

People stay far away. It costs more than R20 return to get there. (Umsinga focus group.)

The other elections did not help us. Why will these ones do so? (Umsinga focus group.)

In the Free State and Gauteng, workshop participants also indicated that registration apathy among young people might have been caused by various factors. One that stood out was the perception that once you registered, the government would be able to trace your whereabouts. This was confirmed by a Soweto focus group participant who said, 'I know some of my friends who are involved in crime and definitely avoided registering, in case the police trace them.'

In the majority of workshops and focus groups a significant number of participants indicated that, after registering, they were unable to verify whether their names actually appeared on the voters' roll. Reasons for that included lack of time, confidence that they were registered and, in some cases, ignorance as to the importance of registration verification. Many of those who did not check the voters' roll discovered only on election day that they were not registered.

### **Did the Electioneering reach Voters Effectively?**

Party political electioneering was largely conducted through rallies, and through the electronic and print media. Electioneering was generally effective in that an overwhelming majority of the electorate knew about the elections. Some political parties avoided areas where there was political hostility to them. There was also concern among a significant number of the workshop and focus

group participants that the IEC campaign ignored fundamental issues, such as political parties being in a 'vote-catching mode' and failing to debate grassroots issues.

The focus group and workshop participants generally agreed that bigger parties did more in terms of electioneering than smaller parties, largely because the former had more resources than the latter, which could partly be attributed to the fact that in line with the current Electoral Act, parties not represented in parliament did not receive any funding to contest the 1999 election.

This situation was criticised by some focus group and workshop participants who supported smaller parties. They also suggested that party political election funding should have been allocated more equitably. A small yet vocal group of individuals argued that small parties should be nourished in order to secure the future of multi-party democracy, which would require adequate funding for electioneering by them.

## **Campaigns and Rallies**

Some local election observers claimed that some political parties did not plan their election campaigns in time, which prevented observers from being present at their rallies. Others suggested that political parties should give their election campaign programmes to election observers by a specified date to facilitate monitoring. They added that this should be made compulsory by the IEC. However, some community representatives claimed that rallies were mainly for registered party members and party sympathisers, and not for any person who wished to get more information about the policies and manifestoes of particular political parties.

Some focus group participants felt that voters voted for parties because they liked certain individuals, rather than because they agreed with the policies of a particular party. This motivation for voting for a particular party pointed to inadequate education about democracy at the grassroots level.

The focus group discussion held in an informal settlement section of Ikageng in North West revealed some interesting findings. Although the election campaign there only consisted of the placement of posters and adverts, the residents there decided to vote for the ruling party for the following reasons:

- Their quality of life had improved since 1994 and they now had access to water, electricity and housing.
- They cherished the freedom of movement they now had.
- Programmes for the elderly had been introduced in their communities.
- They had been freed by the new government from decades of slavery on the farms.

The focus group participants in the Crossroads informal settlement in Cape Town also chose to support the ruling party for locally specific reasons, such as the successful development programmes in their community and improvements in the quality of their lives.

In some parts of South Africa, less political hostility occurred in the 1999 election than in the 1994 election. For example, 'hard no-go bound-aries' (KwaZulu-Natal workshop) which existed in 1994 in KwaZulu Natal, the Eastern Cape and Gauteng softened in 1999. Political contestation nevertheless continued in some pockets in KwaZulu-Natal. In order to canvass votes, rival political parties in KwaZulu-Natal, the Western Cape and the Eastern Cape agreed not to interfere with each other's political activity. But, in some areas, such pacts only lasted until the media left the relevant community. Thereafter rival political parties would shred the posters of their political opponents. There were also instances where political parties were explicitly 'intolerant of other views', although not on a large scale.

Respondents in several provinces, especially the Western Cape, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal, claimed that they evidenced a war of political posters. In the words of a Western Cape workshop participant, it was like a sitcom - one enjoyed the drama, the events, the political theatre of our time, the never-ending war'. The political contestation manifested itself in several ways; pulling

down posters of rival political parties; putting up posters that defame rivals; and disrupting rallies of opponents. Nonetheless, these incidents were few, relatively violence-free, and did not substantially alter the nature and direction of political campaigns in South Africa.

### **Was the Election Run Efficiently and Effectively?**

The workshop and focus group participants supported the view that the 1999 election was run more efficiently and effectively than the 1994 election. However, many problems were also raised about the 1999 election.

### **Overcrowding and Long Queues**

According to the HSRC Election Day Survey, nationally at least 20 per cent of the voters queued for more than two hours, and at some voting stations in North West voters waited ten or more hours to vote. Overcrowding and long queues were most evident in the black townships and informal settlements, and in densely populated inner-city areas that had more than 3,000 voters registered.

Long queues were perhaps the single most important problem encountered by the electorate. In the words of an Eastern Cape voter, 'if anything needs to change, that would be the registration table where you actually register and book in', This complaint was corroborated by an Eastern Cape workshop participant:

That is what caused all the queues for miles, because once they got into the polling station there was no problem. It went smoothly once their name was crossed off the list, but to get your name crossed off the list is what took time. You stood in that queue to get to the table.

In addition, a significant number of voting stations had an insufficient number of tables, voters' rolls and IEC staff.

There were a few cases where violence erupted due to long queues an election day. For example, voters started fighting due to long queues which were becoming 'unbearable' (Ikageng focus group). The voting station was thus closed temporarily but reopened after police intervention. Voting at overcrowded voting stations continued after the closing time. One respondent indicated that he finished voting at midnight on 2 June and another at 03:00 on 3 June 1999. Another participant indicated that she left the voting station at 02:00 on 3 June without voting as the queue was still long and she was tired.

### **Special Votes**

Specific days were set aside for special votes. However, it appears that some of those who qualified for special votes did not get adequate information to make arrangements in due time. Those who fell ill on election day or had just been hospitalised were also not accommodated.

The procedures and rules around special voting were also a problem. The flow of information on special voting was uneven or voting officials were unfamiliar with the specifications for casting special votes. A churchman in KwaZulu-Natal made the following comment in this regard:

The IEC has to try to ensure that each and every community receives the same treatment. For me, I was exposed to three regional council areas. It really was interesting to see that in places you would think there would be intensive training there was a complete lack of training and organisational work.

A Western Cape observer indicated that it was unclear whether observers should or should not vote on days set aside for special votes. Information on special votes was often not understood by those who were entitled to special votes.

### **Voting Stations and Demarcation**

Another set of problems related to voting stations and demarcation:

- It appears as if some people in informal settlements went to wrong stations. This was because they had registered at a mobile station. Apparently some of them spent half the day queuing only to discover they were at a wrong voting station (North West workshop).
- At some voting stations ballot papers ran out and voters had to wait long periods before ballot papers were replenished (Free State workshop).
- The selection of voting stations in other cases was questionable. For example, in Khayelitsha a voting station (wooden church) collapsed (Western Cape workshop).
- At some Gauteng voting stations presiding officers did not understand the voting process. Apparently some people who were not registered at a particular station were allowed to vote (Gauteng workshop).
- At voting stations where scanners (zip-sip machines) were used, the scanners broke down and delayed the process (Northern Province workshop).
- In some cases mobile voting stations moved on, leaving people wishing to vote behind (Umsinga focus group).

Fortunately, the problems that occurred did not substantially threaten the election process. Some of the problems were solved in the course of election day.

### **IEC Staff**

Most workshop and focus group participants contended that the IEC ably employed a great number of people to run voting stations. However, the late employment of key IEC staff resulted in some IEC staff receiving inadequate training and insufficient information about the election process.

In some parts of Gauteng there was concern about the appointment of high-profile political figures as presiding officers. Some regarded this as a 'sign of partisanship on the part of the IEC' (Gauteng workshop).

Lack of understanding of the electoral process frustrated some voters at some stations. The following two remarks related to this problem:

When you go to the voting station maybe you are going to apply for a declaration vote. The person in charge wouldn't allow you to vote, because he didn't receive enough training. The IEC is saying 'go and vote'. And the person in charge is [saying] 'I am in charge here ... I won't allow you to vote'. (Mpumalanga workshop.)

I mean the presiding officers in those voting stations. They didn't have enough information. The IEC didn't properly train them. (Mpumalanga workshop.)

The IEC staff was also claimed to be hardly identifiable at some voting stations. However, this was a problem of limited scope as almost all IEC staff wore an armband.

Another minor but perhaps significant problem was the IEC's lack of provision of food to its staff during the long day and night. As a result officials ate and 'braaied' with party agents, creating the impression that they collaborated with those parties (KwaZulu-Natal workshop).

The use of employed teachers as polling station presiding officers was not well received in the Northern Province, where unemployment is high. There had been strong calls for unemployed people to be trained and utilised but apparently these were ignored.

Apart from a lack of training, which obviously diminished the effectiveness of the IEC officials, there were allegations that some of them were rude and arrogant. An Umsinga focus group participant commented: 'I was monitoring for my party. I had to stay at one station until counting time. The presiding officer sat not moving at any time. When asked for help he did not offer. Children (under age) were going inside and helping.'



In addition to the alleged unhelpfulness, IEC officials stationed at Umsinga were from a different district and thus regarded by locals as 'foreigners'. This sentiment is reflected in the following two comments:

In future IEC officials will not be welcome here. This time we did not want to stop them because people might say that is because it is Umsinga. But next time they will NOT BE WELCOME.

Feeling that the IEC used 'foreign' people. They did not even know Umsinga. How can that person serve him well? There was rigging somewhere.

In the Northern Province, Mpumalanga, the Eastern Cape and the Western Cape there was a notable perception that the recruitment of IEC staff may have been biased against members of certain political parties. At the Crossroads focus group discussion there were allegations that four family members were working at one voting station, which led to animosity against them. This points to the importance of establishing monitoring mechanisms to ensure that recruitment adheres to employment equity. However, evidence of systematic bias in IEC staff recruitment did not emerge.

As the majority of the IEC staff was employed on a temporary basis, it is not surprising that there were some hiccups. However, the focus groups and workshops indicated that the majority of the IEC staff did a fine job, given the apparently insurmountable problems which they overcame.

### **Election Day**

There was palpable peace on election day. Some participants described election day as 'extraordinary' and 'amazing', and the local and international media described it as 'boring'. Some first-time voters described their voting experience as 'a life experience', 'exciting', 'cool', 'thrilling' and 'fulfilling' (Soweto focus group, of whom most were first-time voters).

The 2<sup>nd</sup> of June was declared a public holiday to facilitate voting. Consequently some workshop and focus group participants were concerned that employees of petrol stations and supermarkets, which were open on election day, may have been prevented from voting.

In the Free State, North West, the Northern Cape, the Northern Province, Mpumalanga and North West some farmers did not allow their employees to register and vote. According to an election monitor in the Northern Province, '[f]armers generally did not allow workers to leave their places of work an election day', In the Free State, an election observer indicated that he had heard several accounts of 'farmers locking their workers in so that they cannot go and vote'.

Several problems occurred on election day. The normal means of transport to work and school were unavailable on this holiday. As the voting stations were generally within reach, the lack of transport was not a major problem to many people. However, in some rural areas where voting stations were far, the elderly, in particular, had difficulty to reach the voting stations.

### **Party Agents, Presiding Officers and Observers**

The relationship between party agents, presiding officers and observers is assessed in this section against the Electoral Act which stipulates that political parties have to desist from campaigning near polling stations. Besides, on election day, active political campaigns are banned by legislation, although this has a downside: It 'removed the excitement and the jovial atmosphere' and 'basically every citizen goes by himself (Eastern Cape workshop).

The problems of the presiding officers and the voting officers were exacerbated by the number of people whose names were absent from the voters' roll and the consequent sorting out and explanations. The inadequate skills and training of the presiding officers and voting officers seemed to be a significant problem. In some cases the presiding officers apparently effectively employed the observers as their advisors. In other cases the presiding officers and voting officers were exhausted even before election day, as they had been involved in the preceding three days of special voting and immediately thereafter, on election day, they had to be up at 04:30. Said an Eastern Cape

election observer: 'On that particular day ... they really needed to be sharp and there were thousands of people waiting outside their door (but) they were exhausted.'

Election staff also had problems getting home after the counting had been completed as limited transport arrangements had apparently been made. Many officials had to wait for several hours, notably in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape.

According to an Eastern Cape observer, people trusted observers more than the IEC officials:

If I cannot write I had better trust an observer, because in most cases some of the observers were rurals and people were respected in their home communities, so the voters ended up trusting those [rather than the presiding officers].

In KwaZulu-Natal, strong feelings were expressed regarding the training and ability of both the presiding officers and the voting officers. According to a KwaZulu-Natal participant who was a voting officer, she had not been properly trained:

We were trained the previous night and the election was the following day. And then the problem is that we just saw it on the board. We did not do it practically. But the following day we had to open the boxes and see them open for the first time. For me I was totally confused. I mean that we were not allowed to touch the (ballot) box(es).

The importance of the role of presiding officers in the electoral process requires that they should be carefully selected. According to a KwaZulu-Natal workshop participant, they should have an appropriate 'level of understanding of these issues ... to interpret and translate that kind of information to people who will be reporting to you'. This participant continued:

But at the same time I think the other important issue when we are training people who will be managing the stations we need to be clear as to what kind of level of, not academic qualifications, but exposure [is needed]. A person who can be in a position to read and write and interpret what is written. Because he has to do with a lot of legal kind of powers that are invested in that individual.

Another KwaZulu-Natal workshop participant asserted the following: '[Given] the financial constraints and the lack of training that was given the logical conclusion would be everything was a mess, but I think ... that it was actually a success.'

The claim that the IEC had a 'contingency squad' that could be rushed to 'overloaded' polling stations was rejected by participants who were directly involved with the electoral process. A KwaZulu-Natal workshop participant involved in the IEC put this rejection as follows:

We had contingency staff [but] ... in fact we ended up exhausting all our contingency staff and secondly it was earlier mentioned to all the presiding officers that if you come across a situation whereby you do not have sufficient staff, you have power to get people to come in and work. It appears that many did not take the necessary steps to overcome the first bottleneck.

Party agents were also not trained and some were not properly briefed. Political parties were invited by the IEC to send representatives for training. However, in many cases party agents did not turn up for training. Some of the party agents indicated that they had only been asked by their party organisers on the morning of election day to act as observers.

There was some animosity at certain voting stations between presiding officers and party agents. An Ikageng focus group participant remarked:

In our district the party agents were saying that we should take money and buy food for them. We told them that we were not given any allowance either for meals or transport. We were just taken to the stations and the party agents were just controlling the presiding officers. Even if you were doing a small thing they would come and check what is it that you are writing.

From this section it thus transpires that although the rules of the game were generally spelt out in the Electoral Act, unwritten rules and power relations were operative at different voting stations. Because power relations pre-suppose unequal access to and use of power, the roles of specific officers require clarification in order to avoid confusion.

### **Registration and Ballet Papers**

Although the IEC claimed that the voting districts were properly demarcated and the voting stations were well distributed, some voters claimed otherwise. A KwaZulu-Natal election observer asserted the following:

I think really they never studied the voters' roll properly ... If they know they have got about four thousand people who have registered like Amatikulu, then they were supposed to make about four polling stations there and they never provided properly. Some of the stations did not have people properly trained there and there was a lack of security.

There were also a few incidents of registered people being denied their right to vote. A KwaZulu-Natal election monitor said the following:

I know of some instances where people actually did not vote. They did not know that they had to complete the declaration form and the question of queues affected them ... Some of the voters were not actually registered, so it was a question of training of those officers.

The same sentiments were voiced in the Western Cape, Mpumalanga and the Northern Province.

Cost appears to have been the deciding factor in using cardboard ballot boxes. There was concern, however, in some areas that these ballot boxes invited fraud. A Mpumalanga workshop participant worded this concern as follows: 'I, for one, didn't think it was okay to use paper ballot boxes. We have to stick to the one that was used in 1994. They were metal ones. These ballot boxes, you can easily put in a paper there. Because you see how the box is made.'

### **Political Intimidation**

The majority of focus group and workshop participants confirmed that political tolerance was high during the political campaigns and on election day. In contrast to 1994, political intimidation was almost absent. Even in those areas where there had been political contestation and political hostility in 1994, intimidation either did not exist, or was a mere drop in the ocean in the 1999 election. Moreover, the few instances of what was seen to be political intimidation in 1999 included party agents wearing party badges, elderly people being bussed to voting stations and voters being told which party to vote for, in other words, indirect intimidation. According to a Soweto focus group participant, in Orlando Township

'[p]eople would come with a party's T-shirts, which I thought was not right at all. Some guy was wearing the ANC and the other IFP so I think what they were doing was not right because they were confusing old ladies. When a granny gets in she would see this emblem and say it means I should vote for this guy.'**Lack of Identity Documents**

The majority of identity documents were processed in time. In order to accommodate those who might not receive their bar-coded identity documents in time, the Department of Home Affairs issued temporary registration cards. Therefore the complaint by participants in the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal and the Northern Province that their identity documents arrived late despite their timely application implies that not everyone took advantage of the use of temporary registration cards.

In an attempt to speed up delivery, some political parties themselves apparently delivered identity documents at some voting stations in North West and the Eastern Cape. This understandably

created confusion and insecurity because voters were seen collecting their identity documents from a particular political party.

Security at the polling stations was one of the major problems facing the IEC, voters and observers. Security in the majority of voting stations was generally tight and police and security officials were visible throughout. Specific acts of violence or crime directed at voters were not observed.

However, focus group and workshop participants raised a number of problems.

Police and security officials were not stationed at all the voting stations and where they were stationed, there seemed to be an uneven distribution. For instance, although the Crossroads informal settlement had more people registered than anticipated, there were only two police officers. Peak times were also inadequately catered for. A Mpumalanga workshop participant had the following to say: 'We didn't have enough security. People usually come towards closing hours. You would find only one policeman.'

In addition, even in areas reputed for violence, voters were apparently not searched for weapons when they came to vote. Some voters were concerned that there was no clean sweeping and checking for bombs at polling stations before voting started. Some voting stations did not even have telephones.

### **Vote Counting - Best Possible? Better Alternatives?**

The manner in which vote counting took place was generally commended. Counting the votes at the polling stations was seen to limit the possibility of fraud during the transfer of ballot boxes to a central counting place. The counting system was regarded as effective and fast. The following problem areas were however identified:

- Most election officials worked day and night without a break. This led to exhaustion which slowed down the process toward the end (Crossroads focus group). At a significant number of voting stations in the Eastern Cape presiding officers literally fell asleep and 'did not count the votes' until the following day or two. One election observer in this province added: 'All the observers that I know ... landed up counting votes.'
- Apparently political parties were pressurising the IEC to release unverified results. This caused a problem when a mistake was detected in the number of votes for the IFP and ANC. Whereas the unverified numbers indicated that the IFP was the official opposition, they lost this position after verification. One voter claimed that 'this did not make the IFP happy' (Gauteng workshop).

Although the majority of participants found the vote counting to be fair and efficient, a Mpumalanga workshop participant asserted the opposite: 'I think the counting wasn't fair ... Even where I was observing, they were arguing a lot and they had to count the papers three or four times.'

There were also complaints that some observers were counting ballots instead of observing the process. According to a Mpumalanga workshop participant, '[th]ose guys were - they were tired at that stage, because they were supposed to observe the voting, not the counting. It looks like everybody was not counting.'

The exhaustion after the long and laborious day was captured by a Mpumalanga observer: 'Everything was okay, except that the presiding officer was confused at the end of the day.'

Some participants compared the election processes of 1994 and 1999. A Mpumalanga workshop participant criticised the 1994 confusion about the person responsible for the ballot box, but commended the 1994 arrangement in connection with counting staff; There were teams, and when one team 'knocked off there was another staff that came in for the counting. Those people, they were fresh.'

As some of the voting stations did not have access to electricity, they had to rely on candles and gas lights. Some of the respondents intimated that this might have affected several rural voting stations during the counting process.

All in all, the 1999 vote counting was a major improvement compared to the 1994 vote counting. The problems detected by the participants should however be eliminated as far as possible in the future.

### **Election Results as Expected?**

Almost all the workshop and focus group participants accepted the outcome of the 1999 general election. Many claimed that they were not surprised by the actual results. However, there was some surprise at the poor showing of the Pan-Africanist Congress and the performance of the United Democratic Movement.

Even though the ANC was expected to emerge as the winner, those who voted indicated that voting was one of the key pillars of democratic societies. Therefore, casting a vote implied the voter's acceptance of and participation in democratic consolidation and social transformation. The level of acceptance and participation varied across and within provinces, between rural and urban areas, and even within a single voting district.

### **Major Successes**

The workshop and focus group participants generally appreciated the unfolding and deepening of democracy, the deepening of tolerance and the gelling of patriotism. The success of the election process could be measured by assessing voter education, electioneering, election procedures, election day events and the counting process.

These are some of the ways in which the 1999 election process was described:

It was a good idea to have people vote where they had registered. (KwaZulu-Natal workshop.)

There were police officers in voting stations. I felt a sense of security. (Gauteng workshop.)

The logistics were handled well by the IEC ... the technology was smart, cool, in fact better than anything I've ever seen. (KwaZulu-Natal workshop.)

Conflict management committees were set up to attend to areas such as Green Fields, which was identified as a 'hot spot'. Mediators were apparently deployed and the situation was placed under control, and no violence erupted. (KwaZulu-Natal workshop.)

Queues were reasonably fast in most areas where there was a correct number of people registered. (North West workshop.)

In some voting stations some elderly people were given priority in queues. (Gauteng workshop.)

Joint partnership between the private sector and the IEC was admirable. (KwaZulu-Natal workshop.)

Great - it was one day and quicker. (Eastern Cape workshop.)

There were fewer incidents. (Eastern Cape workshop.)

The voting station was kept open after nine. Everybody who came could vote. (Eastern Cape workshop.)

The ballot papers cast were counted there and then and tallied up. (Gauteng and Free State workshop.)

The doors were closed, everybody was there present and even though there were police but they sat watching as much as they could. The police were awake. (Eastern Cape workshop.)

Just having the visibility of the police in terms of safety was great. (Northern Cape.)

Also the tolerance of the political parties. (Eastern Cape workshop.)

The officials were good tempered and the public waiting. I mean some people waited two hours in a queue just to get in to vote ... other people waited longer. (North West workshop.)

Based on evidence gathered from the focus groups and workshops, the (allowing successes can be identified:

- The 1999 election occurred within an atmosphere of peace.
- The voting procedures were generally free and fair and the IEC officials were, in most cases, helpful.
- Voting districts were properly demarcated, with the exception of a few black townships, informal settlements and densely populated city centres.
- Except in some rural areas, the voting stations were accessible and within easy reach.
- The IEC was greatly efficient and effective in organising, managing and executing the election.

## **Conclusion**

Support for the 1999 election has been extra-ordinary given that millions of voters were poorly educated and indigent. For the majority who voted, the election affirmed that apartheid was dead and that a new democratic society had been born. According to one voter, voting was the 'best tribute to Mandela who gave so much to us' . Most of those who chose not to vote did so out of protest against what they saw as the snail pace of transformation.