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A Vote of Confidence

Results from the IEC Election Satisfaction Survey 2011

The Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) commissioned the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in late 2010 to conduct two studies related to the 2011 Municipal Elections: firstly, a Voter Participation Survey (VPS), which was conducted in November and December 2010; and secondly, an Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) conducted on the day of the elections – 18 May. In this article, JARÉ STRUWIG, BEN ROBERTS, UDESH PILLAY and ELMÉ VIVIER present general findings from the Election Satisfaction Survey.

The main aim of the Election Satisfaction Survey 2011 was to determine opinions and perceptions of both voters and election observers regarding the freeness and fairness of the electoral process.

A further aim of the study was to assess the operational efficiency of the IEC in managing the municipal elections.

The study was conducted among two groups of respondents, namely (i) South Africans who voted in the 2011 Municipal Elections, and (ii) local and international election observers.

The target population for the voter component of the study was individuals aged 18 years and older who are South African citizens, and who were registered as voters for the 2011 Municipal Elections.

The study also conducted interviews among local and international election observers visiting the selected voting stations on election day, though this article presents exclusively the findings from the interviews with voters.

Methodology

A complex sample design was used in drawing the sample of voting stations. The design included stratification and a multistage sampling procedure. The database of voting stations obtained from the

IEC was merged with that of Population Census Enumeration Areas (EAs). The sampling of the voting station was done proportionally to the dominant race type, geo-type and the number of voting stations in a given province.

This was to ensure that a nationally representative sample of voting stations was selected and the results of the survey could be properly weighted to the population of registered voters in the country.

At the actual voting stations, fieldworkers used random sampling to select voters to ensure a fair representation in terms of gender, race, age, and disability status. A sample of 300 voting stations countrywide was selected.

The distribution of these voting stations and the resultant number of interviews at and in the vicinity of the voting stations was proportional to the IEC's distribution of registered voters.

At each voting station 50 voters were interviewed during the course of the day. These were divided into four time slots to ensure a fair spread of interviews over different times of the day, when different dynamics might have been in operation.

General voting experience

Two-thirds of voters (66%) took less than 15 minutes to reach their voting stations, with 20%

taking between 16 to 30 minutes, 9% between 31 to 60 minutes and 5% longer than an hour.

On average, voters waited 23 minutes in the queue before voting. Ninety-seven percent were satisfied with the instructions and signs about where to go and what to do. Ninety-eight percent found the voting procedures *inside* the voting station easy to understand.

Consideration of voting procedure for people with special needs

The majority of voters stated that the voting procedures considered the needs of the elderly (90%), persons with disabilities (80%), the partially sighted (70%), the blind (66%), women (84%), and women with babies (78%). Overall, 85% of the voters found the voting stations easily accessible to persons with disabilities and the elderly, while 8% did not.

Timing of decision on political party of choice

Decisions about party choice were mostly made months prior to election day (75%), with only a small share deciding upon their voting preference on election day or shortly beforehand (11%).



Udesh Pillay presents the results of the Election Satisfaction Survey.

Perceived secrecy of vote

Ninety-seven percent expressed satisfaction with the secrecy of their vote.

Equally high proportions of satisfaction were found among the various race groups, age groups and for men and women.

Political coercion

Ninety-four percent reported that no one had tried to force them to vote for a certain political party. Of those who did mention some form of coercion, 21% said that this had actually changed their decision. The most commonly mentioned sources of coercion were political parties and family or friends.

Political party tolerance

Fifty-nine percent of voters expressed the view that political parties were very tolerant of one another during the 2011 election campaigns, with 22% reporting that parties were somewhat tolerant of each other and 13% perceived intolerance.

Electoral freeness and fairness

An overwhelming majority of sampled voters (95%) felt that the election procedures were free, with a further 2% saying they were free with only minor problems.

Similarly, 94% of the voters were of the opinion that the election procedures were fair, with 2% saying they were fair with only minor problems.

IEC performance

Ninety-seven percent voiced general satisfaction with the quality of services rendered by IEC officials to voters, with 2% expressing a neutral position and 1% dissatisfied. Voters were asked to rate 10 aspects of the conduct of IEC officials at their voting station. Overall, there was a very positive assessment of officials.

They rated officials as extremely friendly (88%), helpful (86%), patient (84%), co-operative (84%), professional (82%), interested in their jobs (82%), honest (81%), knowledgeable about elections (81%), considerate (80%) and impartial (75%).

Voter education

Sixty-eight percent of voters believed that the IEC's voter education was very effective, 22% somewhat effective, and 3% indicating that it was ineffective. Seven percent were uncertain or unsure of how to respond to the question on voter education effectiveness.

Voters were asked to indicate the extent to which they found various information sources to be useful in providing information about voting.

Radio and television (94% and 93% respectively) were the most useful information sources about voting.

Posters and billboards (91%), as well as political parties (87%), newspapers (86%), and pamphlets (80%) also received broadly positive evaluations.

Moderately lower levels of usefulness were reported in relation to voter awareness booklets (73%), civil society organisations (68%), the IEC

communication campaign (67%), and workshops (57%).

Sources based on information technology such as the 'X for Democracy' website (39%) and the IEC website (37%) were found to be useful by the lowest proportion of voters, which is a reflection of the generally low levels of access to this media source.

Overall assessment

Based on an assessment of voter interviews from a representative sample of voting stations, the HSRC finds that the voting public was overwhelmingly confident that the 2011 Municipal Elections were both free and fair, and provided an exceptionally favourable evaluation of the management performance of the IEC and the conduct of officials at voting stations. ◀◀

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**State of
the force**
THE VERDICT IS IN

**Indigenous
Knowledge**
STEALING OUR IK
IS NOT OK

**World
Cup**
Did we
score?

XENOPHOBIA
Stopping the hate