



THE VOTER'S VOICE: OUTCOMES FROM THE 2014 ELECTION SATISFACTION SURVEY

In late 2013, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) tasked the HSRC with conducting two representative studies related to the 2014 national and provincial elections: a voter participation survey (VPS) conducted in November and December 2013, and an election satisfaction survey (ESS) conducted on election day on 7 May 2014. In this article, *Benjamin Roberts, Jarè Struwig, Steven Gordon and Mercy Ngungu* provide an overview of the national results emanating from the election satisfaction survey.



The principal aim of the 2014 ESS was to assess opinions and perceptions of voters and election observers regarding the freeness and fairness of the electoral process. The study was also designed to evaluate the operational efficiency of the IEC in managing the 2014 national and provincial elections. This is important in determining the credibility and legitimacy of the election.

The study was conducted among two groups of respondents, namely South Africans who voted in the 2014 national and provincial elections, and local and international election observers. The target population for the voter component of the study was individuals aged 18 and older who were South African citizens and who were registered

as voters for the 2014 national and provincial elections. In addition, the local and international election observers visiting the selected voting stations on election day were also interviewed. This article looks specifically at the data gathered from voter interviews.

General voting experience

Voters were asked a range of questions designed to elicit a general sense of their electoral experience. The survey found that more than two thirds (69%) of those who voted were able to reach their voting stations in 15 minutes or less, with 20% taking between 16 and 30 minutes, 7% taking between 31 and 60 minutes, and 4% taking in excess of an hour.

On average, voters queued for 25 minutes at their voting stations before casting their vote.



Apart from travelling time, on average, voters queued for 25 minutes at their voting stations before casting their vote, with 66% spending 15 minutes or less queuing. This represented a significant improvement relative to the 2009 election, where on average voters queued for 34 minutes to vote.

At each voting station, the IEC is expected to ensure there is appropriate signage and instructions indicating where voters must go to cast their ballot and what the voting process entails. This is an important element in easing the voting process. Ninety-six percent of all voters were contented with the signage and instructions, of which 66% were extremely satisfied.

Another notable component of electoral management is ensuring the actual procedures that voters follow in casting their ballot inside the voting station are both straightforward and efficient. Ninety-seven percent thought the voting procedures were easy to understand, of which 70% described the process as 'very easy'.

Accommodating voters with special needs

Voters were asked to consider the extent to which they felt voting procedures at their voting station effectively accommodated people with special needs. The majority of voters stated the voting procedures considered 'to a great extent' or 'to some extent' the needs of the elderly (92%), persons with disabilities (87%), the partially sighted (76%), the blind (69%), women (87%) and women with babies (83%). Overall, 85% of voters found the voting stations easily accessible to persons with disabilities and the elderly, 4% were neutral, while 9% did not find the voting stations easily accessible to these groups.



Timing of decision on political party of choice

Voters were asked to indicate when they finally decided who they would vote for in the elections. Party loyalty seemed to have featured to some extent, with more than three quarters of voters (78%) indicating they had made up their mind who to vote for months prior to election day. Only a small share decided their voting preference on election day (7%) or shortly beforehand (6%).

97% of voters voiced satisfaction with the secrecy of their vote.



Perceived secrecy of vote

The survey found 97% of voters voiced satisfaction with the secrecy of their vote, of which 73% were extremely satisfied. Similarly high levels of satisfaction were found irrespective of the population group, age or sex of voters.

Table 1: Perceived secrecy of the vote, 2014 (%)

	Satisfaction with the secrecy of one's vote (percent)
Very satisfied	73.5
Satisfied	23.7
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	1.6
Dissatisfied	0.4
Very dissatisfied	0.5
(Don't know)	0.4
Total	100.0
Total % 'satisfied'	97.2

Note: Column percentages may not add up to 100% exactly due to rounding off.

Source: HSRC (2014) IEC election satisfaction survey (ESS), 2014

Political coercion

Ninety-four percent of voters reported no one tried to force them to vote for a certain political party. Of the 6% who reported some form of coercion, 5% indicated the intimidation had occurred prior to going to the voting station on election day, with the remaining 1% saying it occurred while waiting to vote. Of those who experienced coercion, 27% said this changed their voting decision. The most commonly mentioned sources of this coercion were political parties (45% of cases), family members (29% of cases) and to a lesser extent, other voters (17%).

5% indicated intimidation had occurred prior to going to the voting station... 1% said it occurred while waiting to vote.





Political party tolerance

Political tolerance between contesting political parties and their supporters represents a fundamental component of electoral democracy, and is instrumental in ensuring free and fair elections. More than half (56%) of voters believed that political parties were very tolerant of one another during the 2014 election campaigns. A further 24% reported that parties were somewhat tolerant of each other, while 15% observed that there was no prevailing culture of tolerance.

94% felt the election procedures were free... similarly, 94% of voters were of the opinion the election procedures were fair. ➤

Electoral freeness and fairness

The delivery of free and fair elections represents a central element of the IEC's constitutional mandate and is the cornerstone of liberal democracies. As revealed in Table 2, an overwhelming majority of sampled voters (94%) felt the election procedures were free, while a further 3% indicated they were free with only minor problems. Similarly, 94% of voters were of the opinion the election procedures were fair, with 3% again stating they were fair with minor infringements.

Table 2: Did voters rate the election procedures as free and fair? (%)

	Election procedures were free (percent)	Election procedures were fair (percent)
Yes	94.1	94.1
Yes, with minor problems	2.7	2.8
Not at all	1.6	1.6
(Don't know)	1.6	1.5
Total	100.0	100.0
Total % 'yes'	96.8	96.5

Source: HSRC (2014) IEC election satisfaction survey (ESS), 2014

96% of voters expressed general satisfaction with the quality of services provided by IEC officials. ➤

IEC performance

Ninety-six percent of voters expressed general satisfaction (of which 69% were very satisfied) with the quality of services provided by IEC officials to voters on election day, with 2% expressing a neutral position and only 1% saying they were dissatisfied.

In addition, voters were requested to assess 10 dimensions of the conduct of IEC officials at their voting station. In general, voters offered a considerably positive opinion of electoral staff. They rated officials as extremely helpful (83%), friendly (82%), patient (81%), co-operative (79%), professional (78%), honest (78%), knowledgeable about elections (76%), considerate (76%) interested in their jobs (76%) and impartial (71%).

Voter education

Sixty-five percent of voters believed the IEC's voter education was very effective and 25% believed it was somewhat effective, while 4% indicated it was ineffective. The remaining 6% were uncertain or unsure of how to respond to the question on voter education effectiveness.

Voters were additionally asked to rate the usefulness of sources of information that provided them with information about voting, with response options being 'very useful', 'somewhat useful' or 'not useful'. Radio and television (97% and 96% respectively) were regarded as the most useful information sources about voting. Posters and billboards (92%), as well as newspapers (91%), political parties (90%), pamphlets (89%) and voter awareness booklets (87%) also received broadly positive evaluations. Only small minorities cited these sources as not useful.

Slightly lower levels of perceived usefulness were reported in relation to the IEC communication campaign (82%), civil society organisations (80%), and workshops (77%).

Sources based on information technology such as the IEC website and the 'X for democracy' website were rated as useful by close to two-thirds of voters with access to these forms of media (both 70%). Access to internet-based resources continues to remain relatively circumscribed in the country, so the aforementioned ratings suggest a diversified approach to voter education whereby conventional media sources are strategically used alongside social media to communicate with the electorate.

Concluding reflections

Based on an assessment of voter interviews collected on election day, the HSRC found the voting public was overwhelmingly confident that the 2014 national and provincial elections were both free and fair, and provided an exceptionally favourable evaluation of the management performance of the IEC and the conduct of its officials at voting stations.

The lingering challenge facing the country in future elections remains the mounting political disillusionment among the voting-age public and the electoral disengagement this is inducing.

Methodology

A complex sample design was used in drawing the sample of voting stations. The design included stratification and a multi-stage sampling procedure. 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, population group, age and disability status. A sample of 300 voting stations countrywide was selected for the purposes of the study. To ensure representative data from each province, the distribution of the voting stations and the number of interviews at the voting stations was proportional to the IEC's distribution of registered voters.

At each voting station, 50 voters were expected to be 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 situational dynamics might have been experienced at the voting stations. ■

Authors: Benjamin Roberts and Jarè Struwig SA Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) co-ordinators, HSRC; Steven Gordon, PhD researcher trainee, Democracy, Governance and Service Delivery (DGSD) programme, HSRC; and Mercy Ngungu, data manager, DGSD, HSRC.

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IN CONVERSATION WITH SIPHESIHLE DUMISA



Siphesihle Dumisa, reflects on her participation in a research project designed to commemorate 50 years of the existence of the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) or the African Union (AU), as it is known today, and her contribution to the framing of a new vision for Africa (Agenda 2063) for the next 50 years.

As a young researcher, how did you get involved in such a complicated project?

I applied to present a paper at a youth conference organised by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and was subsequently invited to other regional meetings where I had the opportunity to interact with colleagues from the UNDP. Later, I was invited to serve on the reference group for this project.

What is the project about?

The main objective was to commemorate 50 years of the existence of the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) – today the African Union (AU) – and to contribute to the framing of a new vision for Africa (Agenda 2063).

A team was commissioned by the UNDP and the AU Department of Political Affairs. These two organisations are joint chairs of the governance cluster in the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa, which is a body consisting of UN agencies and organisations working in Africa in support of the AU and its New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) programme.