

CHAPTER 3

Preparations for the Elections

The preparations for South Africa's first non-racial multi-party elections were governed by the highly complex legal structures and electoral regulations put in place to deliver free and fair elections. These complexities reflected decades of deep suspicion emanating from South Africa's traumatised political history, including the development of parallel traditional loyalties and systems of government especially in KwaZulu/Natal. Other factors, such as violence and intimidation and the fear among minority ethnic groups of majority domination hindered the timely preparation of some significant aspects of the election process.

The date of the elections was determined in the multi-party negotiation process in June 1993, but the IEC was set up only in December 1993. From the outset, it was faced with the extraordinarily difficult task both of establishing itself and of mounting national and provincial elections within a four-month time-frame.

The political leadership could not afford to gamble with the opportunity presented by the fragile consensus which emerged in favour of an early election. The IEC's task was further complicated by the fact that only rough estimates were available of the voting population of the country, including the former 'homelands' and self-governing territories such as KwaZulu/Natal. Provision also had to be made for South Africans voting overseas in approximately 80 countries.

The adoption of a system of proportional representation using national and provincial lists enabled voters to cast their votes at any voting station and eliminated the need for the delimitation of constituencies. This was designed to make the elections as inclusive as possible. While national ballot papers were uniform throughout the country, nine different provincial ballot papers had to be produced. Voters could vote anywhere in the country for the National Assembly but they could only vote for the Provincial Legislature of the specific province in which the vote was cast.

No register of eligible voters was prepared. In the time available, this was not possible; but it exacerbated the logistical difficulties faced by the IEC in determining the number and location of voting stations and the personnel and materials needed to service them.

Voter Eligibility Documents

The absence of a voters' register placed greater emphasis on the need for proper identification of the voter at the voting station. Each voter had to produce an eligibility document. This requirement presented a difficulty during the preparatory stages, as many prospective voters were not in possession of any identification documents stipulated in the Electoral Act and had to apply for a Temporary Voter's Card (TVC). The processing of the TVCs was slow, particularly in some 'homelands', and the threat of large-scale disenfranchisement was real. The IEC, in co-ordination with the Department of Home Affairs, sought to remedy the situation by deploying special units to speed up the issue of the TVCs up to and on voting days. We witnessed the operation of this facility in several parts of the country. Mobile units were set up near taxi ranks, at community halls, in shopping centres, in churches, in rural farming communities, in hostels and within the vicinity of some voting stations in order to reach out to as many people as possible.

The IEC estimated two million South Africans lacked valid identification documents for voting. In fact, the figure could have been much higher because of the possibility that the total black population of South Africa had been underestimated. Even during the last day of voting, thousands of TVCs were still being issued. The political parties we met had complained that not enough mobile units were despatched to reach into the townships and 'homelands'. The late entry of the IFP into the elections caused a last minute rush for TVCs by IFP supporters. Facilities were stretched to the limit.

Many of those already in possession of valid identity documents (ID) also applied for TVCs, putting more strain on the system. The failure of the Department of Home Affairs to deliver ID cards to successful applicants meant that they also had to apply, at the last minute, for TVCs. We received many complaints: of rigid application of rules by officials, voters being reluctant to challenge officials when their applications were rejected; of the service being shut down initially by a public service strike in Transkei, Venda, Gazankulu and Lebowa; of failure to publicise the location and opening hours of issuing centres; of shortage of application forms; of officials refusing to issue TVCs over weekends; and of bias in favour of particular parties. In the last few days before voting began, the pace and efficiency of processing TVCs improved significantly, although there were some allegations of abuse. IEC, Home Affairs, SAP and SADF personnel and an army of volunteers worked late into the night and over the weekend to issue TVCs in the townships and 'homelands' up to the last day of voting. Despite all the problems, officials and volunteers were determined to provide an opportunity for every eligible person to vote.

International Assistance

The Commonwealth and other international groups and countries provided technical assistance to help the IEC Election Administration and Monitoring Directorates to prepare training programmes and advise on support services.



A volunteer helping to register a voter for a Temporary Voter's Card at Freedom Square, Soweto.

In many areas, the late appointment of electoral officials and monitors reduced the time available to recruit and train voting station staff and plan for the elections at the local level.

The Commonwealth and the three other IGOs worked closely with the IEC to advise on concerns as they arose. This process culminated on the eve of the poll with a formal letter from the Chairman of the Commonwealth Observer Group to IEC Chairman Mr Justice Johann Kriegler drawing attention to some urgent areas of concern. These included:

- the perceived need for a final effort on voter education, including for electoral officials, particularly through African language radio stations;
- the need to publicise the locations of voting stations in various communities;
- reports of poor communication between IEC headquarters and its various substructures;
- the need to maintain arrangements until the last possible moment for the issue of TVCs; and
- the desirability of keeping in mind the possible need to extend voting hours.

Copies of the letter and response from the IEC are at *Annex XII*.

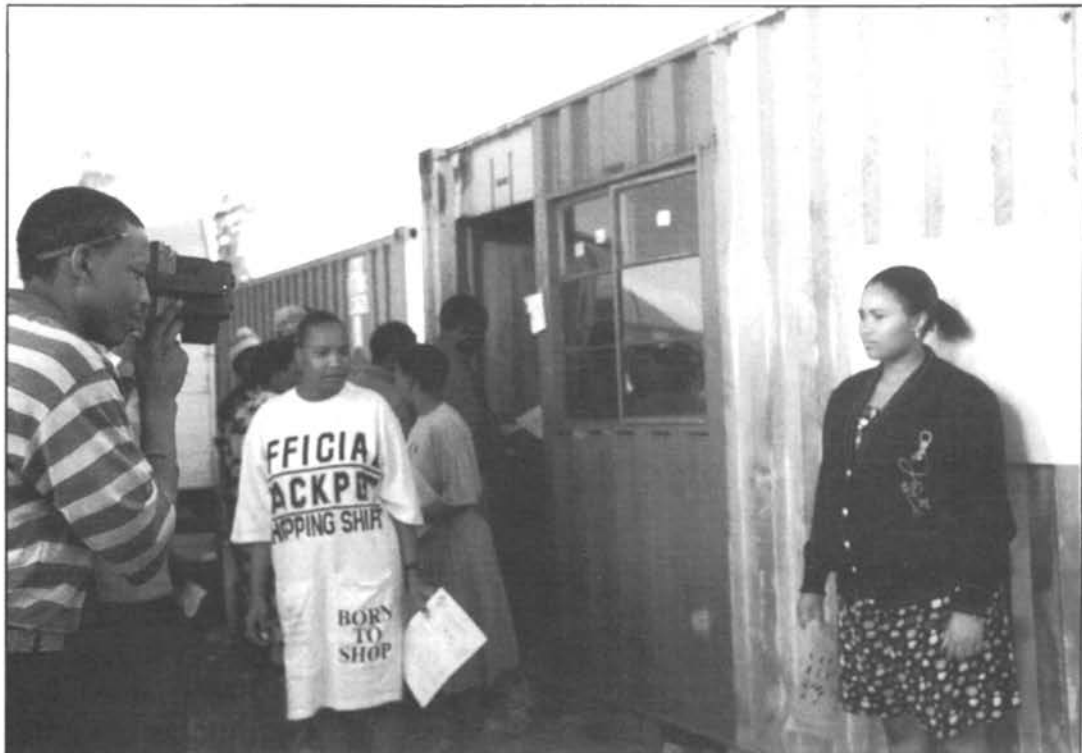
Selection of Voting Sites and Security Constraints

Violence and intimidation in some parts of South Africa, particularly in KwaZulu/Natal and PWV, forced the IEC to adopt extraordinary measures in the selection and protection of voting stations. Stations were selected to meet the special security precautions considered necessary. Each station was required, where possible, to have an outer zone of 1,100 metres, called a controlled area, an intermediate zone called the inner perimeter and an inner zone, called the election centre. These specifications coupled with the need to accommodate expected large numbers of party agents, monitors and observers, meant that voting sites with relatively large available space were needed. In practice, the ideal voting station was seldom achieved but in most cases this did not jeopardise the integrity of the voting.

In order to secure sufficient numbers of security personnel at voting sites, protracted discussions took place between the IEC and the security forces, the latter favouring a smaller number of voting stations than the IEC had contemplated. The IEC had originally planned to set up over 9,000 stations to ensure that there would be one station for a maximum of 3,000 voters per station and that no voter would be more than 10 km from a station. The SAP claimed they did not have sufficient personnel to secure adequately this number of voting stations and at the same time maintain normal policing duties. The IEC also had doubts about its ability to service such a large number of voting stations.



Hundreds of people eagerly lined up to register for Temporary Voters' Cards. Some had converged on the registration stations from early in the morning and continued to seek registration even until the last day of polling.



The rush for Temporary Voters' Cards ... a volunteer takes a Polaroid picture of a voter to enable her to be issued with a card immediately.

Massive reductions were proposed. For example, in Transkei voting stations were to be reduced from the planned 1,800 to 900, in Ciskei from 495 to 320, in Soweto from 245 to 70. Such proposed reductions caused unease and even anger among political parties with some leaders alleging that this was a deliberate attempt to reduce access and frustrate voters. After many emergency meetings up to the eleventh hour between the IEC, the SAP and political parties, it was finally decided that 9,739 stations would be established.

Delays in the final selection of voting stations meant that no final list could be published until the weekend before the commencement of voting. Considerable logistical problems were caused by voting stations being identified and set up on the eve of the poll and in some areas even on voting days. Political parties had difficulty finalising plans for deployment of voting agents and arrangements to transport voters.

Voter Education

In the context of the transition from the apartheid system to a non-racial multi-party democracy, voter education had a key role to play in assisting the millions of black voters who had never voted, many of whom were illiterate. The reach of voter education was extended by the translation of material into several languages.

The IEC was largely dependent on over 100 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which were active in reaching the people in 'homelands' and townships and target groups like women, the aged and prisoners. The IEC concentrated its own programmes on areas not covered by the NGOs. Because of limited resources, transportation problems and lack of local co-operation, many groups admitted their failure to reach all voters, especially black and coloured farm workers living on the vast tracts of white-owned farmland, and black voters living in deep rural parts of the 'homelands'. Some NGOs and the ANC complained that they were frequently unable to obtain agreement from white farmers to conduct voter education. The closest they could get to the farm workers was on shopping days in town. Tables were then set up in the town centre to distribute IEC and other voter education leaflets.

The ANC, the NP and the DP were particularly active in voter education with the latter two having more success in reaching out to farmers and their workers. We attended a number of rallies where mock voting stations were set up to familiarise voters with the procedures. The many unofficial samples of the ballot paper in circulation assisted this process. But because a party-sponsored voter education programme was often linked to political campaigning, independent NGOs were limited in their ability to reach voters in hostile areas.

The IEC, political parties and NGOs produced a variety of materials and forms of communication for their voter education programmes. For example, two million comic books, one million 'how to vote' booklets and thousands of videos, posters, audio tapes and T-shirts were distributed across South Africa.

The IFP's last-minute decision to enter the elections meant that a crash course in voter education had to be conducted in its strongholds in KwaZulu/Natal and in the hostels in the PWV area. The IEC launched a blitz on the last weekend before voting day, entering what had previously been 'no-go' areas to conduct voter education and to issue TVCs to thousands of people. In KwaZulu, the Air Force dropped five tons of voter education leaflets in order to reach as many people as possible, especially in the rural areas. The effectiveness of dropping leaflets on largely illiterate people is questionable and in fact voter education did not extend into many rural KwaZulu areas. Commonwealth teams were able to enter IFP-dominated hostels and establish the fact that residents were keen to vote and were familiar with the procedures.

Voting Arrangements

Because there was no voters' register at each voting station, the stamping of a voter's eligibility document and the marking of the voter's right hand with invisible ink were the main safeguards against multiple voting. Officials also had to guess how many people might use a given voting station on voting day. Sometimes they miscalculated the amounts of supplies they needed and, unfortunately, there was no effective system to redistribute materials around the country to meet demand. Given the inadequacy of population data and because people were free to vote anywhere, such a system should have been in place.

The voting arrangements included provision for citizens of South Africa in foreign countries to vote on Tuesday 26 April 1994, the day appointed for special votes. South African Embassies and UN agencies in about 80 countries established voting stations abroad. IEC-trained staff and party agents were permitted to observe the voting there.

The categories of people permitted to vote as special voters included the disabled, the infirm, the ill, pregnant women, members of the security forces and some categories of prisoners and IEC officials. Mobile voting stations were designated for the taking of special votes at hospitals, old age homes, prisons and jails. This provided good experience for those voting station staff involved and reduced the burden on general voting days.

Two days were set for general voting, 27–28 April 1994, with stations to open at 7.00 a.m. and close at 7.00 p.m. The shortage of voting materials, and distribution and delivery problems led the IEC to authorise Presiding Officers to extend voting hours, and in six areas, voting day was extended to 29 April 1994.

Secrecy of the Vote

Voting was by secret ballot. The IEC had a specific mandate to ensure that the secrecy of the ballot was observed at all stages of the voting and the counting

of the ballots. The Electoral Act required electoral officers and party agents to swear an oath of secrecy.

The layout of, and procedures at, most voting stations took account of the need to safeguard the secrecy of the vote. There were, however, instances when assisted voters did not enjoy the same level of secrecy due to inadequate facilities. Voter education efforts stressed the fact that the secrecy of the vote would be strictly adhered to by all the political parties. On 24 April 1994, the Business Election Fund established by the business community in support of the electoral process, took out a one-page advertisement in several newspapers publicising pledges by the leaders of the ANC, DP, FF, IFP, NP and PAC to respect the secrecy of the ballot.