

Voice of the Voter

2021 Local Government Elections: Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS)



National Results

Report Prepared for
The Electoral Commission (IEC)

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1. Introduction

The Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) commissioned the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in 2021 to conduct two studies related to the 2021 Local Government Elections: firstly a Voter Participation Survey (VPS), which was conducted in September-October 2021, and secondly an Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) conducted on Election Day.

The main aim of the Election Satisfaction Survey 2021 was to determine opinions and perceptions of voters regarding the freeness and fairness of the electoral process. A further aim of the study was to assess the operational efficiency of the Electoral Commission in managing the 2021 Local Government Elections. This is important in evaluating the credibility and integrity of the 2021 elections.

The study was conducted among more than 12,000 South Africans who voted in the 2021 Local Government Elections. The target population for the study was individuals aged 18 years and older who are South African citizens, and who are registered as voters for the 2021 Local Government Elections.

2. Survey Sample

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, race, age, and disability status.

A sample of 300 voting stations countrywide has been selected for the purposes of the study. In order to ensure representative data from each province, the distribution of the voting stations and the number of interviews at the voting stations will be proportional to the Electoral Commission'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. Interviewing was conducted by means of computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI).

The following results are based on the interim captured sample of voter responses (number = 12,229) collected on 1st November 2021. The results have not yet been weighted to the population of registered voters, but this is expected to have either minor or no discernible effect on the percentages reported.

3. Voter Election Satisfaction Survey Results

General Voting Experience

- 68% of voters took less than 15 minutes to reach their voting stations, with 22% taking between 16-30 minutes, 8% taking between 31-60 minutes and 3% longer than an hour.
- On average, 77% of voters waited less than 15 minutes in the queue before voting, 15% took between 16-30 minutes, while only 7% waiting for longer.
- Overall, 86% of the voters found the voting stations easily accessible to persons with disabilities and the elderly while 7% did not.
- 96% reported satisfaction with the instructions and signage at their voting stations.
- 97% 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 (91%), persons with disabilities (85%), the partially sighted and blind (76%), pregnant women (77%), and women with babies (77%).

Timing of decision to vote in the election

- Decisions about whether to vote were mostly made months prior to Election Day, with 62% deciding more than six months beforehand, and a further fifth (18%) deciding between 1 and 6 months beforehand. Only a small share decided upon their voting decision on Election Day (4%) or during the month beforehand (15%).

Perceived secrecy of vote

- 96% of voters expressed satisfaction with the secrecy of their vote. Provincially, this varied between 94% in the Western Cape and North West and 99% in Limpopo.

Satisfaction with the secrecy of one's vote (percent)	
Very satisfied	68.0
Satisfied	27.8
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	2.2
Dissatisfied	0.7
Very dissatisfied	0.2
(Don't know)	1.0
Total	100.0
Total % "satisfied"	95.8

Political party tolerance

- 61% of voters expressed the view that political parties were very tolerant of one another during the 2021 election campaigns, with 26% reporting that parties were somewhat tolerant of each other. By contrast, 7% perceived intolerance, while 6% were uncertain.

Electoral Freeness and Fairness

- An overwhelming majority of sampled voters (95%) feel that the election procedures were free. Provincially, this ranges from 90% in the Western Cape to 98% in Mpumalanga.
- Similarly, 94% of the voters are of the opinion that the election procedures were fair. Provincially, this figure varies between 90% in the Western Cape and 99% in Mpumalanga.

Do you think that the election procedures were free and fair?

	Election procedures were free (percent)	Election procedures were fair (percent)
Yes	91.9	91.8
Yes, with minor problems	3.0	2.5
Not at all	2.0	2.5
(Don't know)	3.1	3.2
Total	100.0	100.0
Total % "yes"	94.9	94.3

Electoral Commission performance

- 96% voiced general satisfaction with the quality of services rendered by electoral staff to voters, with 3% expressing a neutral position and 1% dissatisfied. Provincially, satisfaction ranged between 93% in North West and Gauteng and 98% in Mpumalanga and Limpopo.
- Voters were asked to rate 7 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 helpful (81%), friendly (80%), patient (80%), honest (79%), professional (78%), interested in their jobs (78%), and impartial (69%).

Voter education

- 60% of voters believed that the IEC's voter education was very effective, 25% somewhat effective (total effectiveness = 85%), and 6% indicating that it was ineffective. 9% were uncertain or unsure of how to respond to the question on voter education effectiveness.

Safety and Security

- 93% of voters expressed satisfaction with the safety and security that was provided at their voting stations, while 2% were discontent and 4% were neutral or uncertain.
- Satisfaction with this dimension of the electoral experience ranged between 89% in Gauteng and 98% in Northern Cape and Mpumalanga.

COVID-19 Safety Protocols

- 92% of voters were convinced that the Electoral Commission had done enough to protect voters from COVID-19 at their voting stations, with only 3% dissatisfied and 5% neutral or uncertain. Provincially, this varies between 84% in the Western Cape and 98% in Mpumalanga.
- The percentage of voters that report being vaccinated is 68%, which is appreciably higher than the national average. This suggests that there was a greater tendency among the vaccinated to turn out and cast their ballot than the unvaccinated.

Views on the ballot paper

- The Electoral Commission is committed to ensuring that the local government ballot papers were easily usable by the voting public, allowing each voter to quickly and accurately record their preferred choice of party in a context of increasing numbers of contesting parties.
- 94% of voters were satisfied overall with the ballot papers used in this election, ranging between 88% and 98% provincially.
- Similarly, 93% found it easy to find their party of choice on the ballot papers, ranging between 87% and 98% provincially.

Reported coercion on Election Day

- Voters were asked whether anyone try to force you to vote for a certain political party or independent candidate. In response 2,5% said this occurred outside the voting station, and 0,5 % inside the voting station.

Confidence in the vote counting process

- In total, 84% of voters were completely or very confident that their vote would be accurately counted (52% completely confident; 32% very confident). Only 1% said that they were 'not confident at all' in the vote counting process.

Overall confidence in the Electoral Commission

- Taking all things into account, 90% of voters indicated that they trust or strongly trust the Electoral Commission in general (51% strongly, 39% moderately), while only 7% were neutral, 2% were distrusting, and 1% were uncertain.

- Other nationally representative surveying by the HSRC conducted over the past two decades has shown that trust in the Electoral Commission has declined during the 2010s. This decline is to a lesser extent than other political institutions and it remains **one of the most trusted institutions in the country**. Declining trust in the Commission is partly due to general **disillusionment with the functioning of democracy** and the **performance of core political institutions**.

4. Final assessment

Based on an interim assessment of voter interviews collected on Election Day, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) finds that the voting public is overwhelmingly confident that the 2021 Local Government Elections were both free and fair. As with previous national and provincial as well as municipal elections, voters provided an overwhelmingly positive evaluation of the management performance of the Electoral Commission (IEC) and the conduct of officials at voting stations. These voter evaluations point firmly to the continued integrity of elections in the country.