

**Final Report of the SACC – NFDI Citizen Election
Observation Mission
to the
South African 2024 National and Provincial Elec-
tions on 29 May 2024**



27 June 2024

Contents

1. Executive Summary	3
2. Context/Background.....	4
3. Methodology of the Election Observation Mission (EOM)	5
4. Main Findings of the EOM.....	10
4.1. Pre-election Period.....	10
4.1.1. Constitutional/Legal Framework	10
4.1.2. Changes to Electoral Act	11
4.1.3 Introduction of Independents.....	13
4.2. Preparedness of the IEC.....	13
4.2.1. Late promulgation of the Electoral Amendment Act.....	13
4.2.2. Implementation of the Political Party Funding Act.....	14
4.2.3. Implementation of recommendations from 2019.....	16
4.2.4. Training of IEC officials	17
4.3. Pre-election Security Context.....	17
4.4 Election Day	19
4.4.1. Opening Procedures.....	20
4.4.2. Voting Procedures	23
4.4.3. Closing & Counting Procedures.....	26
4.4.4. Peace & Security on Election Day.....	32
4.5 Transmission & Announcement of Results	34
4.6. Legal Challenges.....	35
5. Conclusion	36
5.1. Findings.....	36
7. Acknowledgements	40

1. Executive Summary

The South African Council of Churches (SACC) and National Foundations Dialogue Initiative (NFDI) deployed a domestic observation mission for the South African 2024 National and Provincial Elections on 29 May 2024. A total of 622 domestic observers contributed to the observation, communicating their observations via mobile devices using proprietary software developed by the partners for the election observation exercise. The volunteer observers were accredited by the IEC, received pre-election training on the electoral process, and were supported by a National Coordination Centre (NCC), under the leadership of the National Secretariat (NS) representing the partner organisations. On 29 May 2024, observers covered all nine (9) provinces and a good spread of urban and rural stations.

Observers arrived at their respective stations before 07h00 to observe and report on the opening, voting, closing and counting procedures which took place on election day. Most reports were positive, with observers reporting high levels of satisfaction, the peacefulness at the polling stations, the conduct and performance of IEC officials, satisfaction with the role played by political party agents as well as confidence in the performance of the South African Police Service (SAPS). The observers did report on the problems and challenges witnessed across the country.

The most common observation reported on by observers concerned the performance of the Voter Management Device (VMD) on election day. Across the country, observers reported witnessing IEC officials struggling to use the VMDs effectively, citing battery issues, connection challenges and failure to read voter ID cards as commonplace. Observers noted the slow pace of verification lead to long waiting times, frustration and complaints from voters. Observers reported that the Section 24a forms were not indexed logically (alphabetically or according to voter ID number) and this extended the voter verification process significantly in some cases. Observers in some stations also reported that IEC officials appeared to be inexperienced, lacked confidence and were sometimes unsure of what to do under conditions where their training did not explicitly cover the correct response.

Overall, the elections took place in a peaceful and orderly manner, with isolated incidents of scuffles, crowd control, and mischievous fake news stories being the main challenges to the 2024 elections. **The SACC & NFDI citizen observer mission to the South African 2024 National and Provincial Elections finds that the elections were substantially free, fair and credibly reflect the will of the South African voters.** The full findings and recommendations of the Observation Mission are reflected below.

2. Context/Background



Image 1: IEC and SAPS officials during voting at a polling station in the Northern Cape, 29 May 2024.

The South African 2024 National and Provincial Elections (NPE) were a landmark event in the country's democratic history, marking the end of three decades of single-party electoral dominance to a new formation of national and provincial coalition. During the pre-election period ahead of 29 May 2024, there were concerns about threats to democratic, credible electionsⁱ. Election Day did face some challenges, yet the process unfolded in a peaceful, orderly, and democratic manner, highlighting the ongoing resilience and integrity of the South African public and democratic institutions.

While the outcomes of the 29 May 2024 elections were peaceful and orderly, the pre-election context was not without its challengesⁱⁱ. South Africa had to navigate a volatile pre-election environment, late amendments to the electoral legislation, and the introduction of independent candidates onto the provincial ballot for the first timeⁱⁱⁱ. Pre-election opinion polls had already prepared the South African public for the likelihood of a new era of coalition politics^{iv}, an unpopular notion for many citizens based on their experiences of dysfunctional coalition politics at the local government level adding to general atmosphere of anxiety. Concerns about the willingness of the governing ANC to accept an election reversal, which did not return the party into power in the 7th Parliament, were also prevalent.

The wider context within which the 2024 elections took place included a challenging socio-economic environment, with record levels of unemployment, especially among the youth, economic inequality, severe and ongoing electricity outages and blackouts in the weeks prior to election day, cost-of-living increases and growing voter apathy. In 2021, in response to the imprisonment of former President Jacob Zuma for contempt of court, parts of KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng experienced riots and unprecedented looting, which President Ramaphosa would later describe as an "attempted insurrection". The riots claimed more than 300 lives and cost the South African economy billions in damages^v. President Ramaphosa would later

concede that in addition to the insurrection agenda, the South African Police Service's handling of the riots was "inept", "poorly coordinated". Interagency cooperation within the security cluster was ineffective. This raised concerns about the capacity of SAPS to ensure the safety and security of the electoral process, particularly in political "hotspots".

As a result of the electoral and wider socio-economic factors ahead of the 2024 elections, the South African Council of Churches (SACC), in collaboration with the National Foundations Dialogue Initiative (NFDI), determined it constructive to support active and engaged citizenship and the practice of democracy through the deployment of a domestic election observation mission with peace monitors and mediators, to hotspots and areas of known insecurity.

The South African Council of Churches (SACC) is an ecumenical association of affiliated Christian Churches, and blocks churches with a mandate to lead common Christian action that works for moral witness in South Africa. One of the pillars of the work of the SACC is in Anchoring Democracy, which focuses on democracy education as part of church education, support for national and local government elections, and addressing concerns of corruption, maladministration and the loss of public trust in public institutions.

The SACC does not exist for the propagation and the advancement of its doctrinal position but is the place where our diverse interpretations of our faith come together in action for **social justice**. It therefore seeks to achieve a visible, just socio-economic and ecological impact, enabled through engaged churches-in-community for a reconciled South Africa and our sub-continent.

Through inclusive dialogue, the National Foundations Dialogue Initiative (NFDI) aims to strengthen South Africa's **constitutional democracy**. Its goals include establishing a responsible and responsive government, as well as advancing economic growth and social cohesion. NFDI facilitates meaningful dialogues amongst diverse society groups to address national issues and foster consensus. Maintaining transparent, equitable, and trustworthy elections is the specific objective of the electoral observer mission, which supports the integrity of democratic processes.

3. Methodology of the Election Observation Mission (EOM)

The SACC/NFDI citizen observation mission covered all nine of South Africa's provinces, including both urban and rural voting stations. Covering all aspects of the voting process on 29 May 2024 starting before the opening of the polling stations up to the counting of the ballots, 622 IEC accredited SACC/NFDI observers followed the elections across all nine provinces of South Africa and had reported to the SACC/NFDI nerve centre. The SACC has observed every democratic election since 1994, except the 2021 local government elections.

When covering the 2019 South African National Elections, KwaZulu-Natal-based NFDI (CALF)^{vi} observers noted that, overall, the voting places were orderly and professional. Although there were a few issues, such as the drawn-out counting process and inconsequential scuffles outside of some polling stations. The largely administrative processes worked well, with voter verification and ballot issuance proceeding without a hitch. Despite a few minor challenges, the IEC staff was commended for their dedication and cooperation. In 2021, the NFDI developed an online training platform for the local government election (LGE) that was deployed on a limited basis. It is anticipated that this system will be upgraded and tested more broadly for the 2026 LGE.

The report of the NFDI Observer Mission on the 2021 LGE in South Africa emphasised that, despite several operational difficulties, the election process was generally uneventful and equitable in every province. Low voter turnout, particularly among young people, as well as challenges with Voter Management Devices (VMDs) and accurate voter registration were major



concerns. Despite the Covid-19 procedures being strictly applied, accommodation of the elderly and people with disabilities was not available in all instances where required. Although there were sporadic accusations of voter intimidation and improper behaviour by party agents, transparency was maintained by party agents and observers. Staff weariness occasionally caused delays in the otherwise orderly ballot counting process. While there were no notable violent occurrences during the election, the rules were followed overall. It was also noted that voter management needs to be improved going forward.

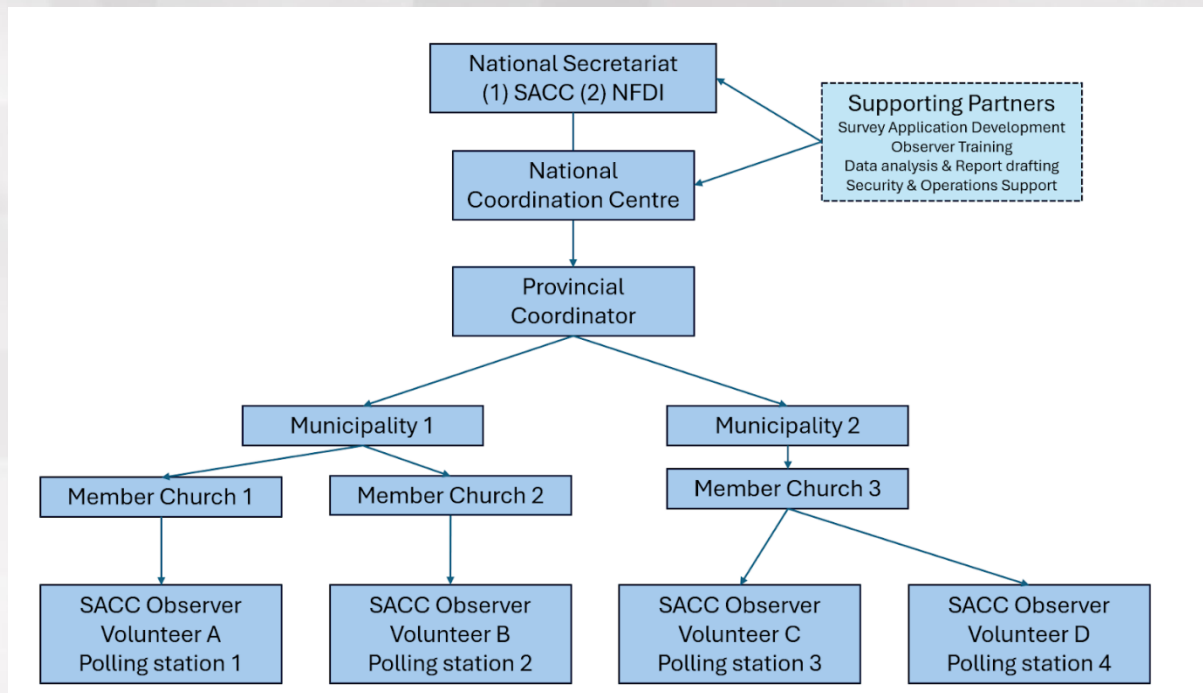
The importance of credible and trustworthy electoral processes is often witnessed by election observation groups. In many countries across the world, international and domestic observer groups track the electoral process and deliver their findings on its credibility in reports and media statements, promoting both transparency and trust building. During the pre-election period in 2024, opposition parties across the spectrum called the integrity of South Africa's electoral process into question, with some going as far as requesting foreign embassies to intervene and deploy observers to hold the IEC accountable for its performance.

International institutions such as the African Union (AU), Southern African Development Community (SADC), African Centre for Governance - Election Observation Mission, Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) and the European Union (EU) deployed observation missions to the 2024 elections, while others such as the United States Government expressed its confidence in the democratic institutions and rule of law in South Africa to ensure that the 2024 elections would be trustworthy and credible.

In addition to the presence of international observer groups to the 2024 elections, several domestic observation initiatives such as Defend Our Democracy, Ground Works Collective and other civil society groups registered with the IEC for domestic observation. The SACC-NFDI domestic observation mission had three goals:

1. Support democratic free and fair elections through a comprehensive domestic observation of the 2024 National and Provincial elections.
2. Promote peace, stability and the rule of law during the 2024 election period.
3. Draw lessons and report on the findings of the SACC-NFDI domestic observer mission for public reflection and debate.

Figure 1 - Structure of the Observation Mission



The SACC-NFDI observer mission structure was constituted to ensure effective and efficient streamlined communication to the observers at the polling stations and return up to the national coordination centre for analysis and rapid response.

National Secretariat: The National Secretariat, including senior leaders from the SACC and NFDI, provided the strategic oversight and direction to the observation mission. This body controls the decision-making, oversight and goals which guide the National Coordination Centre, strategic partners and observers.

National Coordination Centre: The NCC, as the operational hub of the observation mission, was responsible for the logistical implementation of the Observation Mission's goals, the recruitment, training and deployment of the observers, and provided administrative support to the National Secretariat.

Provincial Cluster Coordinators: Provincial Cluster Coordinators in harmony with the SACC-NFDI accredited observers in their respective province, coordinated and maintained smooth lines of communication down to the local level at the polling stations, as well as up to the NCC. Coordinators act as the primary link between the NCC and the observers, thereby easing the administrative burden on the national structures.

SACC Member Churches (SACC): The SACC is composed of 30 member churches. These members supported the SACC's call for volunteers to act as SACC observers to the 2024 National and Provincial elections, assisting the SACC and the volunteers with practical localised support and care.



Image 2: SACC-NFDI observers waiting for the IEC to open a polling station in Gauteng, 29 May 2024.

SACC-NFDI Observers: A total of 622 SACC & NFDI volunteers were accredited by the IEC as domestic observers to the 2024 elections. Observers received 6-hour online training on two separate training dates, with the completion of the training qualifying them to act as observers on behalf of the SACC. Local observers reported their observations via special software to a central database accessed at the NCC, as well as telephonically and via messaging applications to their respective Provincial Cluster Coordinators. On 29 May 2024, a total of 438 observers submitted responses via the data collection toolkit, with an additional 184 via parallel reporting formats, covering all nine provinces with good coverage of both urban and rural areas.

Supporting Partners: The SACC-NFDI contracted various third-party suppliers and experts to support the mission in specific technical aspects of the observation.

These supporting partners worked under the direction of the National Secretariat and NCC to facilitate a professional and streamlined observation process to the 2024 elections.

Recruitment Criteria for SACC-NFDI Observers:

The following were the guiding principles for member churches to consider when nominating election volunteers to be observers:

1. Education level: Minimum Grade 12, competent in English.
2. Proficient with technology (either smartphone, tablet or laptop).
3. Registered to vote in the 2024 elections.
4. Ability to travel within a short distance to their polling station (ideally walking or short riding distance).
5. Should be committed to completing the webinar training.
6. Should be committed to completing the training assessment process successfully.
7. Should demonstrate a competence/ability to observe the elections after the training.
8. Should be restricted to nominating people who are emotionally mature and can remain calm when others become excitable.
9. Should be in good standing in their community and should NOT identify publicly with any political party or organisation.

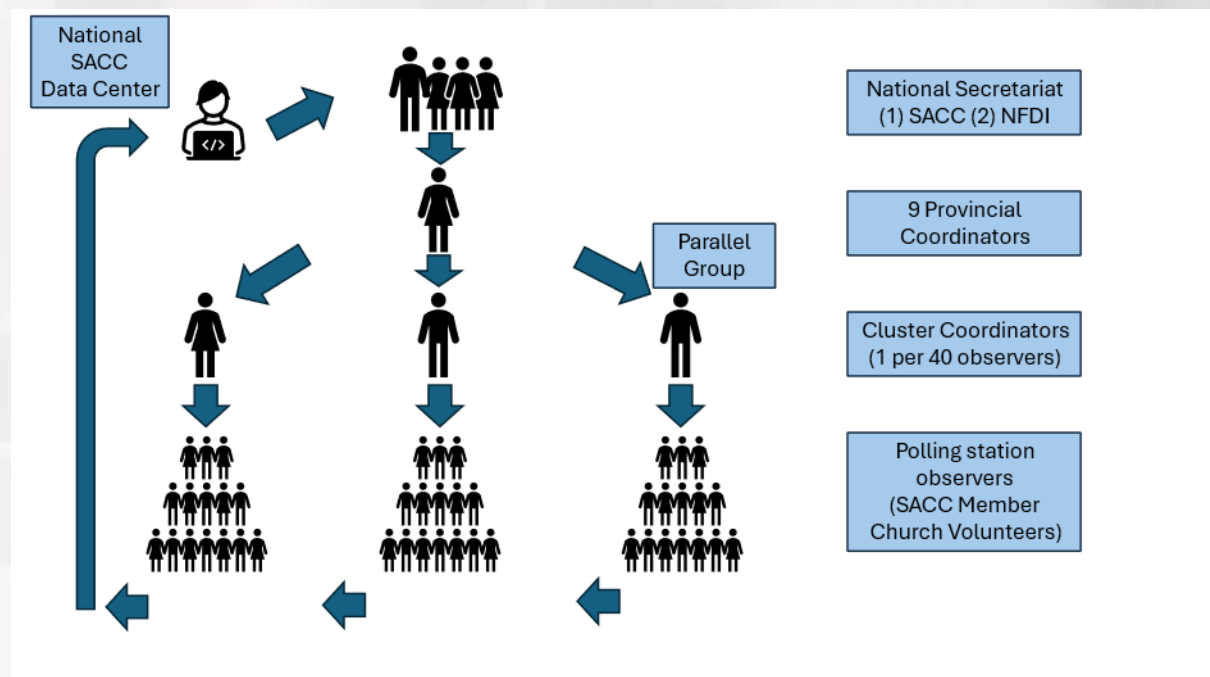


Figure 2 - Election Day Data Collection Process

Using a specialised data collection platform, observers reported their findings through six forms on Election Day, including:

1. Observer Check-In Form on arrival at the polling station
2. Opening Procedures Form
3. Voting Procedures Form
4. Closing Procedures Form
5. Counting Procedures Form
6. Special Issues Form (as necessary)

These forms were relayed to the NCC for collection and analysis and were used in the preparation of the SACC-NFDI preliminary statement and final report. Additional reporting was captured via the Provincial Cluster Coordinators and through messages and voice recordings where other forms of communication were not possible. On 29 May 2024, a total of 438 observers submitted forms via the reporting platform, with another 184 of observers reporting via parallel channels of communication. The findings presented in this report reflect the observations reported to the NCC and data analysts via the reporting tool, the parallel messages and reports provided, and the analysis of the electoral and security situation by the Supporting Partners to the Mission.

4. Main Findings of the EOM

4.1. Pre-election Period

During its election observation mission, the SACC-NFDI team reviewed the legal framework for the 2024 elections, the preparedness of the IEC, and a brief review of the implementation of recommendations made from 2019. On election day, the mission deployed observers to polling stations from before the opening at 07h00 until the final counting tallies were finalised and posted outside polling stations. The following is the findings of this data collection exercise.

4.1.1. Constitutional/Legal Framework

The Constitutional Legal Framework for the 2024 elections in South Africa is based on the country's Constitution and electoral laws, which are framed to ensure the conduct of free, fair, and democratic elections. The key aspects of this framework include:

1. Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996 provisions:

- Section 19: Right to vote and participate in elections
- Section 23: Right to freedom of association and political participation
- Section 46: Elections to the National Assembly and provincial legislatures

2. Electoral Act (No. 73 of 1998):

- Regulates the electoral process, including voter registration, party registration, and electoral disputes

3. Independent Electoral Commission (IEC):

- Established by the Constitution to manage and oversee elections
- Responsible for voter registration, electoral boundary delimitation, and election administration

4. Electoral Commission Regulations:

- Detailed rules governing electoral procedures, including voting, counting, and results management

5. Political Party Funding Act (No. 12 of 2021):

- Regulates the funding of political parties and candidates

6. Electoral Code of Conduct:

- Sets out rules for political parties, candidates, and voters to ensure fair campaigning and voting practices

This legal framework aimed to ensure the integrity, transparency, and credibility of the electoral process in South Africa.

4.1.2. Changes to Electoral Act

In response to the Constitutional Court judgement, 11 June 2020, the National Assembly passed the Electoral Amendment Act of 2023. According to the IEC, the main implications of the Act were:

1. The inclusion and nomination of independent candidates as contesters to elections in the National Assembly and provincial legislatures for the first time.
2. The requirements which must be met by persons who wish to be nominated as independent candidates.
3. The inspection of copies of lists of independent candidates and accompanying documents.
4. Provision for objections to independent candidates.
5. The inclusion of a list of independent candidates entitled to contest elections.
6. Requirement for the appointment of agents by independent candidates.
7. Obligation for independent candidates to abide by the Electoral Code of Conduct.
8. A revised formula for the allocation of seats and their re-allocation in the event of vacated seats.
9. Stipulation for the Minister of Home Affairs to establish the Electoral Reform Consultation Panel. Following independent investigations and consultations, the Panel will make non-binding recommendations on potential reforms of the electoral system for future elections of the National Assembly and the provincial legislatures after the 2024 elections (IEC website, 2024).

The Electoral Amendment Act was subject to two urgent applications by the National Assembly for extensions to ConCourt mandated deadlines, the latter of which saw the draft Bill finalised in February 2023, 18 months after the original deadline set by the ConCourt had expired. President Ramaphosa signed the Bill into law on 20 April 2023, and in response to this announcement, two court applications were made in objection to the Act. The Constitutional Court rendered judgement on these applications on 8 December 2023, dismissing some of the complaints while upholding specific matters brought by the Build One South Africa (BOSA) on the requirements for eligibility of independent candidates. The judgement was suspended for 24 months to allow Parliament to provide the required relief to the Act.

The implications of the protracted legal process leading to the final adoption of the Electoral Amendment Act are profound, in particular for the IEC. The addition of independent candidates, the thresholds for qualification of independent candidates on the ballot, the method of calculation for seats and specific aspects of the current closed-list proportional representation system were impacted by the Act. The IEC further had to account for additional changes gazetted in the 9 May 2024 Electoral Matters Amendment Act, 2024, only 20 days prior to the election date.

For legislative matters with such significant impact on the IEC's preparedness to be completed mere weeks prior to the elections is a highly undesirable state of affairs. For context, the IEC began its concerted preparations for national and provincial elections shortly after the conclusion of the local government elections that occur two years prior to the National polls.

Providing the IEC with only months and in this instance, weeks to comply with the legal framework poses practical challenges to the work of the IEC and creates risks to undermine the reputation and compliance of South Africa's democratic institutions to the legal framework.

4.1.3 Introduction of Independents

As a result of the Electoral Amendment Act, 2023, the 2024 National and Provincial Elections (NPE) included independent candidates on the ballots for both the National and Provincial legislatures. This change required the inclusion of a new, third ballot paper to facilitate the inclusion of independent candidates in the election. For the first time in 2024, voters were issued with 3 ballots (previously 2 ballots were issued). The introduction of the new ballot paper had practical implications for the IEC and the electoral process.

The introduction of the new ballot paper did not appear to be widely understood, despite the efforts of the IEC, media and civil society organisations to provide explanations about the new 3 ballot system introduced in 2024. The additional ballot paper had cost implications (printing, distribution, and extra ballot boxes), and also extended the length of time required to count, tally and reconcile the ballots during the counting process. The management of the additional ballot papers and the relatively truncated voter education around their introduction in 2024 have been blamed for confusion at voting stations, slowing voting and contributing to longer queues, and challenges with the count and reconciliation at polling stations.

The shortcomings of voter education around the 3 ballots should be understood in the context of the IEC's continuous efforts to engage and inform the public about the elections through its social media presence which included 374,195 Facebook users and 239,449 Twitter followers between April 2022 and March 2023. During this period, due to the legal uncertainty surrounding the final Act, the IEC was not able to adequately inform its social media audience about the upcoming changes. This highlights the impact and importance of resolving legislative amendments in a timely manner.

While the introduction of independent candidates is to be welcomed, it is worth noting that despite the inclusion of 10 independent candidates on the various ballots in 2024, **not a single independent candidate attained the necessary support to win a seat.**

Whilst the appearance of independent candidates on the national and provincial ballots enhances the choices available to South African voters, given the small number of candidates who qualified to stand, combined with the lacklustre performance of these candidates, questions must be raised as to whether the system in operation is currently creating too many obstacles for independent candidates to successfully contest against political parties at the national and provincial level.

4.2. Preparedness of the IEC

4.2.1. Late promulgation of the Electoral Amendment Act

As already highlighted, the promulgation of the Electoral Amendment Act in 2023, and the subsequent legal action suspending its implementation until early 2024, impacted on the IEC's ability to properly prepare for the 2024 elections. The fact that the amendments created an entirely new ballot paper and system of counting the seats in the National Assembly, as well as introducing independent candidates into the nominations process, were material challenges to the IEC's ability to prepare for the 2024 elections.

Not all the changes were detrimental to the IEC's ability to plan for the 2024 polls. Changes to the method in which Section 24(a) voting was permitted, allowed (at least in theory) for the IEC to anticipate more accurately which voting stations were going to have higher than anticipated voter turnout, and thus allocate resources accordingly.

Regrettably, the SACC-NFDI observers noted that the Section 24(a) lists were not prepared according to a logical or sequential ordering (such as alphabetical arrangement) and this had a substantial impact in some voting stations on election day in slowing down the verification of voters on the Section 24(a) register. The SACC-NFDI observers also noted that, in some areas, voters were not aware of the changes to the Section 24(a) special voting provisions. In stations in KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Gauteng, observers reported issues with voters switching voting stations, assuming that the previous conditions for special votes still applied. This situation caused unhappiness and confusion when they discovered that this was not the case. In several previous elections, voters had been able to switch voting stations using the Section 24(a) form without prior notice. While the new provisions should make the IEC's job more streamlined in future elections, the execution of the new regulations in 2024 were not without glitches.

4.2.2. Implementation of the Political Party Funding Act

The Political Party Funding Act (No. 12 of 2021) was implemented in South Africa to regulate the funding of political parties and promote transparency and accountability. The 2024 National and Provincial elections were the first national elections to be held since the enactment of this Act, with responsibility for its administration and ensuring compliance by political parties falling on the IEC.

Key aspects of its implementation include:

1. Disclosure of donations: Political parties must disclose all donations above R100,000 to the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC).
2. Donor disclosure: Party donors must disclose their identity and the amount donated.
3. Limitations on donations: No individual or entity can donate more than R15 million per year.
4. Prohibition on foreign donations: Political parties cannot accept donations from foreign governments, entities, or individuals.
5. Public funding: Qualified political parties receive public funding based on their performance in the previous election.
6. Private funding: Political parties can receive private donations, subject to disclosure and limits.
7. Reporting requirements: Political parties must submit quarterly reports on donations and expenditure to the IEC.
8. Enforcement: The IEC monitors compliance and investigates any breaches, with penalties for non-compliance.

In addition to placing restrictions on direct funding to political parties and increasing transparency in the reporting of donations, the Act also provides for a collective pool of funding to be collected and distributed by the IEC to all legally registered political parties. This provision was intended to support competitive multi-party elections, with donors contributing to a Multi-Party Democracy Fund (MPDF) which is split proportionately among the parties by the IEC.

The SACC-NFDI notes that the 2024 elections were contested by the largest number of political parties and independent candidates since 1994. Despite the existence of the MPDF as a mechanism to foster healthy and competitive political parties, the IEC reported that in 2023, not a single Rand was disbursed to political parties through the MPDF.

In comparison, the Represented Political Parties Fund (RPPF) which is funded through the National Assembly disbursed R342,292,504 during the financial year to political parties represented at National and Provincial level.

Table 1 - Financial Disbursements to Political Parties Fiscal Year 2023

Fund	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Total
Represented Political Parties Fund	R85 573 126,00	R85 573 126,00	R85 573 126,00	R85 573 126,00	R342 292 504,00
Multi-Party Democracy Fund	R0	R0	R0	R0	R0
Total	R85 573 126,00	R85 573 126,00	R85 573 126,00	R85 573 126,00	R342 292 504,00

Source: IEC Annual Report 2023. p. 83.

4.2.3. Implementation of recommendations from 2019

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) of South Africa implemented several recommendations which had its genesis from post-2019 elections, including:

1. Voter registration drive: The IEC conducted a nationwide voter registration drive to increase voter rolls and improve voter participation.
2. Electoral boundary changes: The IEC reviewed and adjusted electoral boundaries to ensure more representative electoral districts.
3. Voting system improvements: The IEC introduced a new voting system, including a redesigned ballot paper and improved voting materials.
4. Voter verification and authentication: The IEC introduced a new voter verification and authentication system to enhance the accuracy of voter registration and voting processes.
5. Electoral staff training: The IEC provided comprehensive training for electoral staff to enhance their skills and knowledge.
6. Improved election materials management: The IEC streamlined the management and distribution of election materials to reduce logistical challenges.
7. Enhanced voter education: The IEC implemented voter education programs to inform citizens about the electoral process and voting procedures.
8. Improved results management: The IEC upgraded its results management system to facilitate more efficient and accurate results capturing and dissemination.
9. Strengthened electoral dispute resolution: The IEC established a more effective dispute resolution mechanism to address electoral complaints and disputes.
10. Improved stakeholder engagement: The IEC enhanced its engagement with political parties, civil society, and other stakeholders to foster collaboration and trust in the electoral process.

These implementations aimed to address challenges and concerns identified during the 2019 elections, enhancing the overall integrity, efficiency, and credibility of South Africa's electoral process.

The SACC-NFDI applauds the IEC's commitment to remaining a learning organisation, periodically reviewing its own performance and seeking to improve in the delivery of its objectives. Reviewing the recommendations of international and domestic observer groups, political parties, civil society organisations and the media and undertaking the appropriate reforms reinforces the IEC's commitment to transparency, accountability and excellence.

4.2.4. Training of IEC officials

According to its 2023 Annual Report, the IEC is encouraging an e-learning culture within the organisation. This process has been facilitated through e-learning modules and driven by change champions within the IEC's different units.

The training of the Presiding Officers and temporary staff starts with an assessment of recent performance, in this instance the performance of Presiding Officers during the 2021 Local Government Elections. After the 2021 elections, the IEC conducted an assessment of the Presiding Officer performance through the Provincial Offices of the IEC. On the basis of this assessment, the Presiding Officers are either: (1) Retained; (2) Demoted; or (3) Blacklisted.

For the 2024 elections, training for Presiding Officers (PO), Deputy Presiding Officers (DPO) and Voters Roll Officers (VRO) included at least two separate four/five day training sessions, using a cascade training model. Training materials are developed at the national level with input from provincial IEC offices, and then master trainers are trained on the materials at the National IEC premises, before taking these training materials back to their respective provinces. Provincial cascade training further disseminated the training skills required for these personnel. In addition to in-person training of these three key officials in each polling station, the IEC encourages all of its electoral staff to continually engage with the IEC's e-learning platform. The IEC made significant efforts to retain experienced POs, DPOs and VROs from previous elections, although this was not always possible. Applications to act as an IEC electoral support staff member during the 2024 NPE were submitted online via the IEC's website and advertisements calling for applications were circulated in January 2024.

4.3. Pre-election Security Context

Tensions were high during the pre-election period. Uncertainty linked to the outcome and the government post-election results heightened the possibility of violence and unrest during the election period. There was an expectation of post-election disruption, particularly in the Kwa-Zulu Natal area where uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) made a significant impact.

However, this was mitigated by the South African Police Service, who deployed more resources and managed to achieve the stated objectives by deploying at least three to six officers at by far most polling stations. The National Joint Operational and Intelligence Structure (NATJOINTS) met three times a day at the NROC. The security structure indicated that they were focussing their efforts on 660 voting station areas considered to be high risk. This strategy appears to have been largely successful.

The NATJOINTS at the NROC was routinely visited by the EOM with the view to sharing information. Whilst the EOM was politely received, the security structure did not appear to be as well coordinated as it was in 2019 and 2021. It was far less inclusive and proactive. No attempt had been made to constitute a formal Operations Room, nor was there any apparent visual dashboards, tracking of incidents or mechanisms to collate or share information. This was an opportunity missed, notably because the observers and the media had people on the ground who could have served to provide on point information to the security services where disruption and criminality occurred.

There were no mechanisms to share information about hotspots and incidences which would have assisted EOM in its deployment of Observers and manage risk.

Protest Action (Related to Service Delivery): Day one of the country's special voting was marred by several delays, including taxi strikes, service delivery protests and voting material not reaching polling stations on time, leaving about 107 of the voting stations across the country closed. However, in context, the lead up to elections was observed to be generally peaceful with no reports of any issue relating to elections being reported in Limpopo, Northwest, Free State, Northern Cape and Western Cape.

On 27 May 2024 burning tyres were placed on the R544 in Mpumalanga, near Emalahleni, Duvha. In Kwazulu-Natal, protesters placed burning tyres on the Fredville Inchanga area, as well as on Burnwood Road in Springfield. No casualties were reported. Protest action was reported in Gauteng at Orange Farm, Eyethu, Biccard and Jutta Road, as well as in Diepsloot on School Road and Evaton in Welgevonden Road, Zone 3 and 6. Additionally, a total of seven cases involving interference with posters and one of assault, were registered in Gauteng. In the Eastern Cape protest action was reported on the R72 at Port Alfred, in Mthatha on the N2, Idutywa and R61 QueensTown, Bizane and at Nelson Mandela Drive near the Walter Sisulu University.

The IEC held routine briefings for the media and the public at the NROC where on the 27th May 2024 Deputy Chief Electoral Officer **Masego Sheburi** said that the commission was working with stakeholders to get the negatively affected voting stations open by the 28th May 2024.

According to Sheburi, they were satisfied with the voter turnout despite the interruptions, and further urged South Africans to continue to head out-in their numbers-to vote on Wednesday 29 May 2024.

As of 2pm Monday, Sheburi said an estimated 201,794 special votes were processed in 22,626 service points.

"All special votes collected are stored securely overnight on May 27 and 28 and will be transported to voting stations on May 29, to be opened, reconciled, and added to the ordinary ballots cast before counting begins," he said.

On the second day of special votes, no significant issues were reported. The turnout for special voting far exceeded expectations, and the security situation remained calm and without major incidents. The IEC reported back on the Tuesday briefings that two party officials were arrested in Mpumalanga for interfering with election material.

Election Tampering/Fraud: The KZN Police reportedly uncovered IEC Voting Material allegedly at an ANC official's home in Chesterville on the 26 May 2024. The ANC official had been taken into custody. The matter is still subject to investigation as the police conducts their inquiries.

Trends: In the lead up to elections a matter of concern was the trend of "Influence for hire" which it is submitted, contributing to distorting public discourse and undermining the credibility of the IEC and the transparency of the elections. Investigations into monitoring trends in political discourse revealed that the buying and selling of influence on the social media platform X is becoming a significant trend that requires scrutiny. For example, a video clip of an IEC official allegedly "stuffing fraudulent votes" into a ballot box turned out to be a legitimate act as processed special votes were being fed into a ballot box.

Another issue was disinformation flooding social media pertaining to the pens offered by the IEC personnel containing *disappearing* ink which vanishes once the voters have posted their votes. The disinformation spread throughout the social media platforms alleging that the voting forms are then shared and utilised by various parties to enhance their party performance. The issue was directly addressed by the IEC at the NROC, where the disinformation was appropriately debunked.

While most South Africans relied on traditional media to help them decide on whom to vote for on Wednesday, 29 May 2024, millions of users on the social media platform X, including journalists and policymakers, were influenced by trending topics without realising it.

These users trust the content the influencers share, unaware that much of it is potentially part of a carefully crafted, paid campaign to discredit the credibility of the IEC.

The commodification of influence is a growing industry characterised by manipulating public opinion through paid endorsements by anonymous mega influencers on social media platforms such as X. Unlike accounts held by celebrities, politicians and popular content creators, who can be held accountable, anonymous mega influencer accounts are difficult to track. The SACC-NFDI notes that over the 2024 elections, the IEC partnered with media monitoring organisations to counteract misleading and false information through its *The Real 411* complaints reporting and fact-checking platform (www.real411.org).

4.4 Election Day

On 29 May 2024, the SACC and NFDI deployed a total of 622 observers, covering all nine provinces and both urban and rural areas.

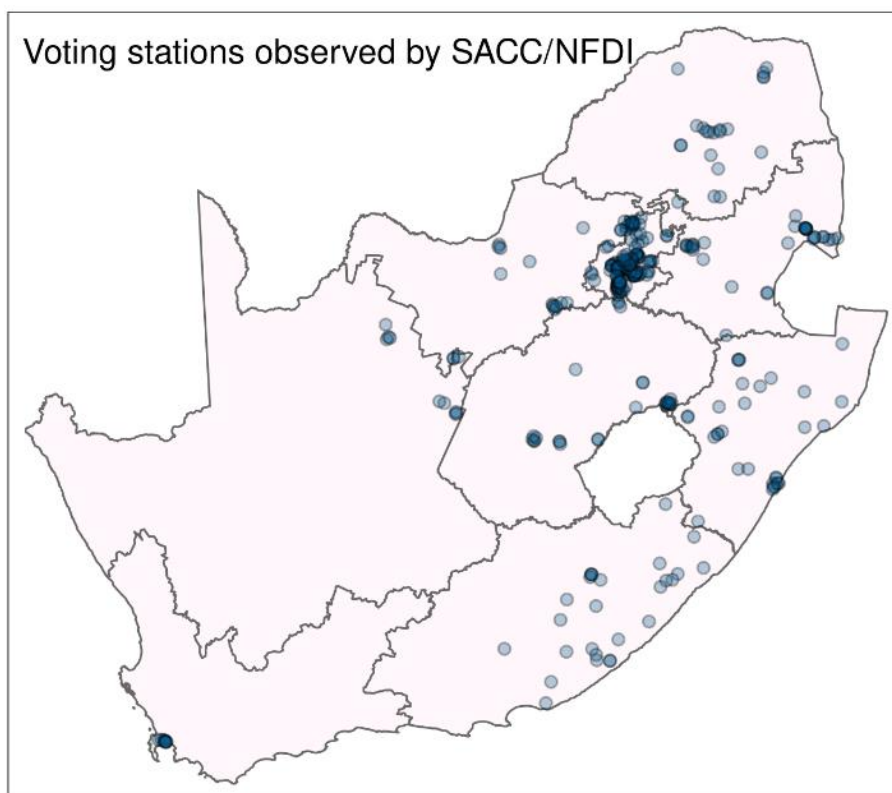


Image 3: Regional Coverage of the 2024 South African National and Provincial Elections by Polling Station. Darker areas indicate higher density of observer coverage (overlapping stations), while lighter dots indicate lower density of observed stations in those areas.

Province	Number of observers
Eastern Cape	33
Free State	41
Gauteng	307
KwaZulu-Natal	43
Limpopo	30
Mpumalanga	93
Northern Cape	18
North West	23
Western Cape	34
TOTAL	622*

**The data tables below reflect only data entries submitted through the SACC-NFDI official platform. Due to technical issues, some observers submitted data through alternate channels, and the substance of this data is reflected in the findings, but not the data tables. The total here is the full and correct number of observers deployed by the mission on 29 May 2024.*

4.4.1. Opening Procedures



Image 4: (left) IEC officials verify voters on the voters register and (right) political party agents observe the count in the Eastern Cape, 29 May 2024.

The SACC-NFDI reported on the opening procedures in 435 polling stations on 29 May 2024. 411 (94%) of SACC observers reported that polling stations opened on time. Where polling stations opened late, the main reasons were missing materials and IEC officials being unfamiliar with the processes. In 433 polling stations (99%), the SACC observers were the only non-party agents observing the opening process. The use of local observers in all regions of South Africa demonstrated the extensive reach that the church has across South Africa. 363 (83%) of polling stations reported a peaceful environment and noted queues of voters at the time of opening.

Opening 1: Did the polling station open on time?

Yes	356	81.4%
No	81	18.6%

Opening 2: Were political party agents present during the opening?

Yes	413	94.5%
No	24	5.5%

Opening 3: Were any other groups (election observers, media, Provincial/National IEC officials etc) present at the opening of the polling station?

Yes	286	65.7%
No	149	34.3%

Opening 4: During opening, did you witness issues that disrupted the voting process? (eg. Unruly behaviour, interference with officials, etc)

Yes	72	16.4%
No	365	83.5%

Based on the data provided from 435 polling stations, the SACC-NFDI observers reported that the opening procedures were orderly, started on time, and were witnessed by political party agents and/or other observer groups in most polling stations. Where polling stations did not open on time, there were slightly more reports of late opening in rural voting stations in the Eastern Cape than any of the other provinces. There was however only a small statistical difference between late openings reported by the SACC-NFDI observers in the Eastern Cape compared to other provinces. Observers across all nine provinces reported challenges faced by the IEC officials with the VMDs and noted challenges with familiarity with the processes for opening and securing the voting stations according to the IEC regulations.

Objections and Overall Assessment of the Opening

Opening 5: Did political party agents raise objections about any matter with the IEC officials during the opening?

Yes	87	19.9%
No	347	79.4%
n/a	3	0.6%

The SACC-NFDI observers noted that political party agents raised objections to some aspect of the opening procedures in 19,9% of the polling places observed. Complaints did not originate more from any one party than others according to the observer data, and there were no consistent themes to the complaints. Party agents complained about not being allowed to inspect the materials prior to the opening (in some instances despite their late arrival to the polling station), dissatisfaction with seating arrangements for party agents, complaints about “disorganised preparations” by the IEC officials, complaints that the voting started late, complaints that the voting started early, complaints that not all the political parties were present at the opening, and complaints from a party that both its agents didn’t have enough space to be inside the polling station together. The most consistent complaint made by the party agents (16 out of 87 reports on the topic/subject) had to do with the VMDs, although here again the range of complaints differed between different stations.

The SACC-NFDI recorded complaints registered from the following party agents:

ACTION-SA
African National Congress (ANC)
African Transformation Movement (ATM)
Build One South Africa (BOSA)
Congress of the People (COPE)
Democratic Alliance (DA)
Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF)
Economic Liberators Forum South Africa (ELF-SA)
GOOD Party
Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)
uMkhonto we Sizwe Party (MK)
Patriotic Alliance
Rise Mzansi
United Democratic Movement (UDM)

When asked to provide a holistic view of the opening procedures, SACC observers rated the opening of voting stations on 29 May 2024 as:

Very Good	214	49.1%
Good	202	46.4%
Poor	17	3.9%
Very Poor	2	0.4%

In conclusion, SACC-NFDI observers reported high levels of satisfaction in the opening processes, which took place in a peaceful environment with some challenges reported with queue control and the VMDs.

4.4.2. Voting Procedures

The SACC-NFDI observed the voting processes between 07h00 and 21h00 on 29 May 2024 at 440 polling stations across all nine provinces. During the voting, most SACC-NFDI observers remained at one polling station, but in a handful of instances, the same observer submitted reports from 2 or more polling stations during the voting day. In almost all polling places, polling proceeded smoothly, with few major issues being reported.



Image 5: Voters waiting to vote at a polling station Gauteng, 29 May 2024.

Voting 1: During your time at the voting station, were the ballot boxes properly sealed and visible?

Yes	434	98.6%
No	6	1.4%

Voting 2: Please select the option which best describes the queue management at the polling station.

Orderly	376	95.1%
Chaotic	13	3.3%
Other	6	1.5%

Observers reported consistent challenges with the VMDs, particularly the battery life of the devices, failing to verify voter IDs automatically (requiring manual verification processes which slowed down the voting process), and connectivity to the network as the main challenges experienced. The slow rate of processing impacted on the queue length and time spent in queues, which was also a consistent issue reported in various polling stations across the country. Observers described the vast majority of the queues outside polling stations as orderly with only 3,3% reported as chaotic. Reports of chaotic queues did not concentrate in any area of the country, with no province or region reporting more than 3 chaotic queues observed.

Observers also noted significant differences in queue length at different polling stations. At some polling stations, voters reported queuing for less than 30 minutes, while at others they complained they had to wait multiple hours in the queue.

Voting 3: Were all election materials required available during the voting process? (Scanner, indelible ink, manual registration book, ballot papers, ballot booth, pens for the booths, ballot boxes, seals, IEC forms)

Yes	425	96.5%
No	15	3.4%

Observers reported sufficient voting materials in 97% of polling stations. In all but 2 of the polling stations where SACC-NFDI noted missing materials, the report referred to malfunctioning VMDs. In 1 station, indelible ink for the voters' thumbs had depleted, and in 1 station the issued ballot stamp was out of ink.

The manual verification of Section 24a special votes was another consequence of the VMDs not functioning as intended in some polling stations. Observers reported that the Section 24a forms were not ordered logically (alphabetically or according to voter ID number) and this extended the voter verification process significantly in some cases. Observers in some stations also reported that IEC officials appeared to be inexperienced, lacked confidence and were sometimes unsure of what to do under conditions where their training did not explicitly cover the correct response.

Voter Concerns

Accommodation for the elderly, pregnant and nursing mothers and persons with disabilities was inconsistently applied, with 52% of stations noting that considerations for these voters were made, while in the remainder, observers did not observe any voters needing assistance. Despite two days being set aside for special votes for the infirm, aged or bedridden, a lot of elderly people arrived on voting day, (which is their right), the SACC-NFDI noted complaints from voters of how groups of elderly arrived in busses on voting day and held up the queues as they were given preferential treatment. This was particularly prevalent in reports from the Western Cape. In 3 stations, observers reported queue disruptions due to officials allowing voters to “jump the queue” without explaining to the voters waiting in the queue that these persons were being given consideration as either pregnant or nursing mothers, elderly or infirm.

Voting 4: Did voting have to stop at any stage during the voting hours?

Yes	311	70.8%
No	83	18.9%
n/a	46	10.2%

Observers noted that voters complained about the inefficiency of the VMDs which did not effectively read identification cards. Officials often had to attempt the scanning of an ID several times before the system confirmed the veracity of the identity card. In some cases, the VMDs did not successfully verify the voter ID cards even after several attempts, and IEC officials had to resort to the manual verification method. Observers also reported that IEC staff applied the verification procedures inconsistently.



Image 6: Not all queue control was orderly and peaceful like this polling station in Gauteng, 29 May 2024.

Comments from SACC-NFDI observers highlighted concerns that the voting booths were not designed to accommodate handicapped people in wheelchairs. It was noted that the cardboard voting booths were too shallow to accommodate a person's knees in a wheelchair. This meant that the wheelchair user had to either address the booth from the side, or take each ballot paper and use his or her lap as a platform to mark the ballot paper, making it difficult to carry out the procedure, and undermining the anonymity of the act.

When asked to provide a holistic view of the voting procedures from 07h00 - 21h00 on 29 May 2024, SACC observers rated the voting process:

Very Good	209	57.8%
Good	150	41.5%
Poor	1	0.2%
Very Poor	1	0.2%

In conclusion, SACC-NFDI observers reported high levels of satisfaction during the voting procedures. The main concerns noted related to the layout of polling stations, the use and functioning of the VMDs, verification of the Section 24a voters on the separate voters register for special votes, and inconsistent application of considerations for pregnant and nursing mothers, the elderly and infirm, and accessibility for persons in wheelchairs.

4.4.3. Closing & Counting Procedures

Closing

In accordance with the Electoral Regulations, polling stations close at 21h00 on the day of an election, unless voters who arrived at the polling station prior to 21h00 are still queuing to vote. In such cases, voting should proceed until all eligible voters have cast their ballots. As a result, not all polling stations close at the scheduled 21h00 based on the length of the queue at that station at closing time.

Closing 1: Were there still voters in the queue outside the polling station at 21h00 closing time?

Yes	135	36.3%%
No	234	63.6%

Closing 2: Were all voters in the queue outside the polling station at 21h00 closing time allowed to vote before voting was closed?

Yes	120	90.2%%
No	17	9.8%
n/a	233	-

36,3% of the SACC-NFDI observers reported that voting continued beyond the 21h00 closing time due to voters in the queue. In 90% of these stations, the observers reported that the voters in the queue at 21h00 were processed and allowed to vote before the station was closed. For the 17 stations where observers reported this not to be the case, there appears to have been some confusion about the correct procedures for persons arriving *after* 21h00, which the observers may have incorrectly reflected in this data. According to the IEC regulations, unless a voter is already in the queue at the cut-off time of 21h00 on 29 May 2024, they are not entitled to join the queue, even if voting is continuing beyond this time. During data reconciliation, in 12 of these 17 instances, this appears to have been the case. For the other five, the observers did not elaborate on why they answered 'No' to *Closing 2*.

Closing 3: Were any political parties present at the closing procedures?

Yes	347	94.0%
No	22	5.9%

Closing 4: Were any other groups (election observers, media, Provincial/National IEC officials etc) present at the closing procedures?

Yes	206	55.6%
No	164	44.3%

During the Opening and Voting reporting periods, SACC-NFDI observers reported strong representation of political party agents at most polling stations. In 94% of polling stations where observers reported on the closing procedures, political party agents were present. Additionally, at 206 (55.6%) of polling stations, other observer groups or accredited monitors were present. Given the importance of the closing and counting procedures to the declaration of results, the strong presence of multiple party agents in almost all polling stations, and a good presence of additional observer groups in slightly more than half of the polling stations ensures high levels of transparency during a crucial moment in the electoral process.

Closing 5: Were members of the community or political party supporters gathered around/outside the polling station during closing?

Yes	232	62.8%
No	137	37.1%

Closing 6: During the closing procedures, would you describe the polling station and its environment as peaceful and orderly?

Yes	355	95.9%
No	15	4.0%

Closing 7: Were South African Police Services members present at the polling station to assist with securing the location?

Yes	357	96.7%
No	12	3.2%

The finding that in 62% of polling stations, community members or supporters of political parties had gathered around/outside the polling station at closing time is quite high, and under other circumstances could be cause for concern. The IEC regulations encourage all voters, supporters and citizens not to remain within 100 metres of a polling station after voting. However, despite what was clear interest in the results from community members in many locations, SACC-NFDI observers reported in almost all polling stations the environment was peaceful and orderly. The clear presence of SAPS personnel in 96.7% of stations observed is also encouraging.

Closing 8: Did the IEC officials follow the closing procedures in accordance with correct electoral procedures?

Yes	368	99.7%
No	1	0.3%

SACC-NFDI observers reported near perfect adherence to the closing procedures by the IEC officials, which probably explains the strongly positive review of the IEC officials and satisfaction with the closing processes. The overall rating by observers of the closing procedures:

Very Good	225	60.8%
Good	117	31.6%
Satisfactory	28	7.5%
Poor	0	0%
Very Poor	0	0%

Counting

The counting process for South African elections takes place at the polling station, directly after the closing procedures have been finalised. The polling station is sealed and until the final count is confirmed, the SAPS is responsible for ensuring that no one enters or exits the polling station where the count is taking place. The SACC-NFDI observed the count at 267 polling stations.

Counting 1: Was all access to the polling station secured and the doors closed prior to the commencement of the counting process?

Yes	265	99.2%
No	2	0.8%

Counting 2: Were the ballot boxes properly sealed at the start of the counting process?

Yes	263	98.5%
No	4	1.5%

Counting 3: Prior to starting the count, did the Presiding Officer explain the counting process to the party agents and other observers present?

Yes	264	98.8%
No	3	1.2%

Observers reported that almost all polling stations conducted the count under the appropriate conditions and according to the IEC guidelines and regulations. In the 4 instances where SACC-NFDI observers reported the seals were not properly sealed, no further elaboration was given, so it is not possible to add further to this matter.

Counting 4: Were there any objections raised after the Presiding Officer's explanation?

Yes	233	88.2%
No	31	11.7%

Of the 31 objections noted by the observers, most of these appear to have been disagreements between the party agents and IEC officials on the process for the count. This is a common complaint made by political parties during the counting process, and often indicates that one of either the IEC officials or the party agents are not familiar with the guidelines for the counting process. 88% of the counting stations observed did not have any objections to the counting processes as explained by the Presiding Officer.

Counting 5: Did you observe disputes between IEC officials and party agents about ballot paper validity (e.g Disputes about ballot paper validity)

Yes	201	75.2%
No	66	24.7%

Counting 6: Did any political party agent object to the official results recorded by the IEC officials?

Yes	229	85.7%
No	38	14.3%

The SACC-NFDI observers reported witnessing disputes about the validity of a vote in 24.7% of the stations observed.

These disputes were mostly around whether or not a vote should be deemed invalid, and over the application of invalid vote rulings. According to IEC regulations, the Presiding Officer is empowered to make the final determination on validity of disputed ballots and should a party agent or other observer still not agree with their decision, then the aggrieved person can submit a complaint written into the PO's election diary. These complaints are then reviewed after the count by the IEC's auditors, and where necessary, the disputed ballots are adjusted accordingly by the auditors, ensuring fair and consistent application of the regulations.

*Counting 7: Please rate your impression of the **IEC officials** competency during the counting & tallying procedures.*

Very Good	165	62.2%
Good	74	27.9%
Satisfactory	20	7.5%
Poor	6	2.2%
Very Poor	0	0%

*Counting 8: Please rate your impression of the **political party agents** during the closing procedures.*

Very Good	137	51.3%
Good	95	35.5%
Satisfactory	33	12.3%
Poor	0	0.0%
Very Poor	2	0.7%

Observers reported good levels of confidence in the performance of both the IEC officials and the political party agents during the count, which is encouraging, given some of the complaints and accusations of vote rigging which received national coverage in the days between the completion of the count and the announcement of the results on 2 June 2024.

Overall, the observers impression of the counting process was:

Very Good	128	61.0%
Good	96	32.2%
Satisfactory	20	6.7%
Poor	0	0%
Very Poor	0	0%

Summary of the election day findings

While observers noted specific challenges at different polling stations at specific stages of the electoral process (opening, voting, closing or counting), the issues raised were isolated and dispersed across the country. In no wards, regions or provinces were systemic issues reported on throughout the day, indicating that issues noted by the observers were isolated incidences and not indications of systemic failure or irregularities.

The most consistent concerns reported by observers in the field included the (mal/mis) functioning of the VMDs, inconsistent queue management and the verification of voters using either the manual voters register or the Section 24a register. Observers noted that party agents were vigilant across the country, with mention of complaints from a wide cross-section of the parties captured by the observer reports. Observers highlighted concerns about the inexperience of IEC staff in a small percentage of polling stations, issues with access of polling stations by persons in wheelchairs, and inconsistent verification of the voters at polling stations in a small number of wards.

Overall, the impression of election procedures on 29 May 2024 was consistently positive, with high degrees of confidence and satisfaction in the 4 areas of the voting process being reported across the country.

4.4.4. Peace & Security on Election Day



Image 7: South African Police Services personnel were responsible for maintaining peace and orderliness at polling stations, like this polling station in KwaZulu-Natal.

Peace and Security Analysis of Opening Procedures

On the peacefulness and security presence at the polling stations, SACC-NFDI observers reported high levels of satisfaction with both the environment, the presence and conduct of the police, and reported only isolated incidents of disruption to the electoral process.

Security 1: Would you describe the polling station and its environment as peaceful and orderly?

	Opening	Voting	Closing
Yes	412	423	355
No	24	17	15

Where observers reported "No" to the question above, the primary reasons were chaotic queue control/poor queue control management or generally crowded conditions outside of the polling station. In a small number of reports, observers noted that the SAPS personnel were not visible in or around the polling station.

Security 2: Describe the role of the security personnel at the station.

	Opening	Voting	Closing
Professional	390	358	345
Passive	10	7	7
Not visible	15	11	7
Interfering	4	6	2
Intimidating	5	7	1
Obstructive	1	1	1
None of the above	10	5	1

Nearly 90% of the observers reported satisfaction with the presence and performance of South African Police Services (SAPS) personnel deployed at the polling stations. Observers reported on a peaceful environment, with no specific area indicating systemic issues relating to security. Where observers reported that polling stations were not peaceful, no province or area reported meaningful numbers, with Gauteng the highest with 7 reports of chaotic queue control during the day, leading to unhappiness among voters.

SACC-NFDI noted that it was reported on social media that in KZN Marianhill, Sthundu Ward 14 that no ballot papers arrived at 09h26 and the voters were turned away and sent home. However, the final results for the IEC reflect that a full set of results was posted for Sithundu Hill voting station, and that if there was a problem here, it appears to have been resolved and voters were able to cast their ballots.

Security 3: Please rate your impression of the security environment during the opening.

	Opening	Voting	Closing
Very Good	237	223	213
Good	148	126	135

Satisfactory	39	41	19
Poor	6	4	0
Very Poor	7	0	3

Whilst there were reports related to political violence in the lead up to elections, and whilst there were concerns about electoral violence, the voting process appeared to conclude relatively smoothly. It was reported that in the North West, the SAPS fired rubber bullets at service delivery protesters in Taung and at Shaleng, Taung (North West) protest actions were reported outside the voting station where one protester was shot by police with a rubber bullet. The protest was quickly cleared with SAPS Monitoring the situation.

In KwaZulu-Natal reports were received of voters carrying traditional weapons at voting stations in the Uthukela District. Reports of gunshots heard outside a voting station in Pinetown were investigated by SAPS.

In Gauteng, voting was temporarily stopped by protesters in the Sydenham area. This was quickly attended to by the SAPS. A confrontation over voters roll lists between the EFF and the IEC staff was reported at Sakhisizwe Secondary School (Weilers Farm/ Majazana) Ward 6.

Apart from these isolated incidents, election day was characterised by calm and endurance over the rest of the country with no other direct threats observed by SACC/NFDI Observers on election day.

4.5 Transmission & Announcement of Results

The SACC-NFDI deployed a team of religious leaders, technical, data and security specialists to the National Results Operation Centre (NROC) in Midrand, Gauteng from 26 May - 2 June 2024. This team monitored the transmission and announcement of the results from the finalisation of the counting process up to the announcement of the results on 2 June 2024.

The mission noted that the process of transmitting and confirming the results as transmitted from the polling stations to the NROC was in line with the legislation and election regulations. Additionally, the IEC provided access to the results to all political parties including the provision of party monitor desks for each party on the main floor of the NROC. The media and data analysts were also given access to the data to monitor the transmission of results for any anomalies or concerns. Overall, this enhanced the transparency of the results transmission process, an important measure of trust building in any election.

The mission did note specific complaints, accusations and allegations of vote rigging, manipulation of results and legal challenges to the announcement of the results by political parties. These are covered under Section 4.6. Legal Challenges.

The mission did note that on 31 May 2024, at approximately 08h03, the public display at the NROC stopped displaying the results. Simultaneously, requests for updates to the IEC results portal indicated that the portal was also not functional. This situation persisted for approximately 90 minutes until the board was turned on again and the results portal once more started returning results.

The SACC-NFDI noted with concern that during this period, political parties, media and social media speculated on the significance and implications of the outage, indicating that this incident had the potential to negatively impact perceptions of transparency at a critical moment in the transmission or results. While technical glitches do occur, the timing and the visibility of this system shutdown could under other circumstances have significantly damaged public trust in the integrity of the election results.

The mission's data analysts ran comparisons between results captured before and after the shutdown and confirmed that there were no discrepancies between the results. It is important to note however that an incident during specific moments of high anxiety, particularly between the finalisation of the count and announcement of final results should be avoided as far as possible.

Another matter of significant concern which the transmission of results demonstrated is the ongoing decline of voters in the electoral process itself. The final voter turnout figure in 2024 of 16,262,506 votes out of 27,723,279 registered voters represented a registered voter turnout of 58.66%, the lowest turnout percentage recorded since 1994, and a decline of more than 2,4 million votes compared to the 2014 National and Provincial Elections. The declining voter turnout figures are of long-term concern for the health of South Africa's electoral democracy, and the current voter turnout figures are a cause for real concern moving forward. The IEC, National Assembly, political parties and all concerned South Africans need to urgently address this trend with a view to engaging significantly more voters in future elections.

4.6. Legal Challenges

There were five main legal challenges to the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) over elections in South Africa, including the disqualification of Jacob Zuma, the leader of the MK party. The IEC's decision to bar Jacob Zuma from contesting elections due to his criminal conviction was challenged in court, with the court ruling in favour of Zuma.

In a summary of the judgement, the Electoral Court stated that it ruled in favour of the MK party's appeal application "in the interests of justice" and "Leave to appeal was granted on the basis that the matter raises issues which are of public interest, deals with the interplay between section 30 of the Electoral Act and section 47(1)(e), read with section 19(3) of the Constitution, and that there are prospects of success,"

Civil society organisations have challenged the Electoral Amendment Bill signed into law by President Cyril Ramaphosa, arguing that it is unconstitutional and creates unequal competition between independent candidates and political parties.

The electoral system has been challenged for distorting proportional representation and creating unequal competition between independent candidates and political parties. The signature entry requirements and other qualifying criteria for independent candidates have been challenged as unconstitutional. A ConCourt ruling did confirm that the original requirements for independent candidate eligibility should be adjusted to allow for the principles of equality and fairness in the contestation of elections moving forward.

Finally, the MK party has taken the IEC to the Constitutional Court over the election results, alleging vote rigging and manipulation. Former President Zuma stated that, "The IEC manipulated the votes for the African National Congress (ANC)." While Zuma and the MK party have made untested claims of vote rigging, they have yet to produce evidence of their claims. This application was refused on 12 June 2024 by a full bench of judges.

The SACC observers noted that the IEC had a team of legal experts situated at the NROC in offices appropriately named the “Shark Tank” In interviews with the legal personnel at the Shark Tank they confirmed that, generally speaking, the legal challenges and objections were considerably less than previous years and, with exception of the challenges which have been brought before the High Court, and for which the SACC cannot comment on the merits of each case, as some of the matters are still *sub-judice*, it is the SACC’s view that all complaints and challenges were processed in a transparent and professional manner.

5. Conclusion



Image 8: Voters queuing to vote in Limpopo, 29 May 2024.

The value of citizen observers on the ground, with knowledge and experience of the area that they live and work in is, it is submitted extremely valuable in providing a positive role, observing voting stations where international observers never access and contributes towards the veracity of elections, creates confidence amongst voters in the integrity of the system and mitigates possible intimidation, exposes violence, and disruption. In support of peaceful and democratic elections in 2024, the SACC & NFDI fielded 622 observers across all 9 provinces, covering urban and rural areas. Gauteng was the most represented province, but all provinces except the North-West and Northern Cape were covered by a minimum of 30 observers.

5.1. Findings

The 2024 National and Provincial Elections took place in a context of significant socio-economic challenges which had the potential to impact the administration of the 2024 polls. The late promulgation of legislation that had a direct and meaningful impact on the IEC’s preparations was regrettable, and in future, the National Assembly needs to provide sufficient clarity on the legal framework under which elections take place to avoid a repetition of the challenges faced in implementing these last-minute changes.

The IEC’s responsibilities were increased in several meaningful areas, such as catering for more overseas voting stations, the introduction of independent candidates to national and provincial ballots, the extra costs and administration of adding a third ballot paper to the voting and counting process, and the monitoring of political party funding have added to the responsibilities of the IEC.

Concerns over the possibility of election-related violence were also heightened after the July 2021 riots and the anticipation of a closely contested election at both the national and regional level in provinces like Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. Various social media applications were also used to widely disseminate misleading and inaccurate information that undermined trust in the IEC and the South African government throughout the pre-election period.

This contributed to heightened anxiety about the prospects for peaceful and orderly elections in 2024.

While the SACC & NFDI mission noted some specific concerns during the conduct of the 2024 elections, such as the functionality of the Voting Management Devices, issues with the use of the manual voter's register to verify voters, and challenges with slow voting and lengthy queues in some areas, the administration of the 2024 National and Provincial elections were conducted in full accordance with the legislative and electoral framework of South Africa. The Mission's observers reported isolated and sporadic issues throughout election day, and overall expressed high levels of satisfaction in the process of the elections.

The transmission and announcement of results was handled in a consistent and transparent manner, apart from the downtime on 31 May 2024 when the results portal and display at the NROC went down. Political party grievances were recorded, and where parties took issue with the IEC, parties made full use of their rights to seek redress from the Electoral Court. Taking into account the information available to it, the South African Council of Churches and the National Foundations Dialogue Initiative Citizen Observer Mission to the South African 2024 National and Provincial Elections finds that the elections were substantially free and fair, and credibly reflect the will of the South African voters.



Image 9: Observers covered a cross-section of urban and rural polling stations across South Africa, 29 May 2024.

6. Recommendations (1 – 2 pages)

For the Independent Electoral Commission:

1. Review the functionality of the existing Voter Management Device (VMD) and assess whether this device is fit for purpose.
2. Review the performance of its polling station electoral officials and the outcomes achieved through its training programmes.
3. Urgently initiate innovative and effective ways to reverse the current voter disengagement in partnership with broader society. This must be aimed at implementing medium to long term strategies that drive greater voter participation in South Africa's electoral processes.
4. Improve the process of observer accreditation feedback especially communicating and how the feedback is being provided to the domestic observers. This will allow for better coordination from the observers.
5. Review the allocation of resources and polling stations based on the new application of Section 24(a) voting concessions, with a view to avoiding congested polling stations with high numbers of special votes.
6. Identify polling stations where voting closed late and review the IEC's administrative procedures, polling station allocations and other measures to reduce queue waiting times for voters as much as possible.
7. Continue voter and civic education initiatives now that the new 3 ballot electoral system has been gazetted.
8. Consider the suitability of voting booths for persons using wheelchairs and consider alternative accommodations for persons with disabilities when voting, such as a laptop tray with front and side panels that persons in wheelchairs can use to protect their right to privacy.
9. Place the QR code posters that confirm the registered voters at the station be posted 50-100 metres from the voting station entrance rather than at the voting station entrance will save voters from the frustration of queuing at the wrong station.
10. The IEC should commission an independent investigation into their almost 2-hour glitch on their results website at the National Results Operation Centre with an announcement of mitigating measures that will be taken to avoid a repeat of this incident in the future.

For the South African Police Service:

1. The National Joint Operational Centre (NATJOC) at the NROC was severely under-resourced. It is submitted that the facilities were too small to allow for integrated and combined coordination of information. Future planning should cater for a larger, better resourced venue, where a fully-fledged and professionally equipped dashboard for tracking of incidents and "hotspots" could be displayed on screens for ease of briefing.
2. Briefings and sharing relevant information with media and observers should be conducted in an inclusive and transparent manner, within the NATJOC which is constantly updated by trained operators drawn from the security cluster (SANDF, SAPS, DHA, DOJ&CD and Public Private Government Initiative) to run the operation centre continuously over the election period. There were no mechanisms to share information about hotspots and incidences which would have assisted EOM in its deployment of Observers and manage risk.

For the media:

1. The media should continuously highlight and refute fake news and false narratives, incitement and threats of violence and treat social media sources with the appropriate degree of caution when reporting election-related stories and content.
2. Work with the IEC to roll out continuous and ongoing civic and voter education to educate and inform citizens about the importance of participating in elections.

For political parties:

1. Political parties should refrain from using media statements, public utterances and social media to undermine confidence in the electoral process. Political parties are entitled by law to relief through the Courts and are encouraged to use this right whenever they feel aggrieved.
2. Political parties should urgently review their performance considering the continuing decline in voter participation during the 2024 elections. Political parties have a responsibility to educate and encourage voters to engage in the electoral process and should complement the work of the IEC, the South African government and other stakeholders in addressing voter apathy and continuing declines in voter participation.

For the South African legislature:

1. To consider regional and international best practice by passing a law that consolidates the legal framework a minimum of six to nine months prior to national elections. In several countries, changes that occur after a specific date prior to national elections are deferred to future elections, providing predictability and consistency to the preparations that the election management body undertakes ahead of elections. The SACC recommends a series of cut off dates and ultimately a moratorium on the introduction of new legislation within a window period prior to national elections as a safeguard against uncertainty and disruption to election preparation roadmaps.

7. Acknowledgements

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- SASRIA
- Several anonymous corporate donors

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- Azimuth Solutions
- Code Garden
- Get Matrix
- Independent Election Observer Coalition

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Lastly, we commend the dedicated activist citizens and the SACC's 32-member churches who enthusiastically responded to the "Call to Action" to train and serve as observers for the 2024 National and Provincial Election. Their tenacity and service excellence exemplifies the spirit of civic engagement and commitment to the democratic process.

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About the SACC:

The South African Council of Churches (SACC) is an ecumenical association of affiliated Christian Churches, and blocks of churches such as The Evangelical Alliance and the Council of African Independent Churches, and the International Federation of Christian Churches, with a mandate to lead common Christian action that works for moral witness in South Africa. SACC does not exist for the propagation and the advancement of its doctrinal position, but is the place where our diverse interpretations of our faith come together in action for **social justice**. It therefore seeks to achieve a visible, just, socio-economic and ecological impact, enabled through engaged churches-in-community for a reconciled South Africa and our sub-continent.

About the NFDI:

The National Foundations Dialogue Initiative (NFDI) encourages consensus building through dialogue. The social and political diversity of its founding members is a reflection of our country. The NFDI is convinced that dialogue provides a basis upon which we can confront our challenges, fears and perceptions about one another to find solutions for the common good of our nation. Its membership consists of 7 Foundations, namely, the Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe, FW De Klerk, Thabo Mbeki, Desmond & Leah Tutu Legacy, Umlambo, Chief Albert Luthuli and Kgalema Motlanthe.

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