



**NATIONAL
DEMOCRATIC
INSTITUTE**
FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Manzini Town Council Elections

REPORT

29 November 1997

**Report of the National Democratic Institute's
Election Observation Delegation**

to

the Manzini (Swaziland) Town Council Elections

29 November 1997

{With the assistance of a grant from the United States Agency for International
Development }

Table of Contents

	Page Number
I. Report	
A. Introduction	1
B. Background	1
C. Program Activities	2
D. Election Observation Delegation	3
1) Positive Aspects	4
2) Negative Aspects	4
E. Results	5
F. Conclusions	6
II. Appendices	
A. Mosimane Report	
B. Schuller Report	
C. Mijiga Report	

Manzini Town Council Elections
Report of the National Democratic Institute's
Observer Delegation
29 November 1997

Introduction

This report is a compilation of the three reports from the National Democratic Institute's election observation team in the Manzini Swaziland elections of 29 November 1997. This report also reflects the work of the Institute in the pre-election period. The election is significant in that it was the first truly competitive local government election exercise ever to take place in the country.

Under the terms of an agreement signed in April 1997 between USAID and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), the Institute agreed to undertake a program to assist in the voter education of residents of Manzini, the largest town in Swaziland, for local government elections scheduled for 29 November.

NDI's objective was to increase voter registration and participation in the Manzini Town Council elections. In order to achieve these results, NDI produced materials and trained university students to inform citizens as to their rights and responsibilities in an election. In addition, NDI responded to the requests of election authorities to train polling officials.

NDI assisted in all aspects of the preparations for the November 29 elections. First, NDI sponsored an elections assessment one month before polling to check the preparedness of the elections. Next, NDI trained candidates and election staff. In addition, NDI produced a *Voting Times* and posters explaining the electoral process. Finally, NDI organized a team of election observers for the voting on November 29.

BACKGROUND

The current political situation in Swaziland can best be described as in turmoil. Swaziland is in the process of deciding whether or not to politically liberalize from its current status as a monarchy ruled by the king to a multi-party state. Events in the other countries in the region have forced the Swazi King and his ruling establishment to at least consider liberalizing the political environment. Presently, a Constitutional Review Commission (CRC) is undertaking the task of

rewriting the 1968 Constitution and the 1973 Decrees that banned political parties.

However, the CRC is viewed by the progressive forces in the country as controlled by the King and his political supporters. In late September, the remaining progressive forces on the CRC resigned in protest over what they saw as excessive interference by the King. Many analysts viewed these resignations as dramatically undermining the credibility and fairness of the constitution drafting process.

In this environment, the forces for democratic change are clamoring for faster action. While there is no threat of an armed struggle in Swaziland, violent episodes have occurred in recent months that are contrary to Swazi culture and custom. In November, the King's motorcade was stoned by strikers from various labor unions in Swaziland. This stoning was the first of its kind in Swazi-history and the labor unions immediately apologized the next day for these actions. However, this incident clearly points to a growing level of frustration within the progressive forces in the country.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Beginning in October, NDI initiated a sustained amount of programming in Swaziland in the run-up to the November 29 election. The programming concentrated on three main areas: the production of voter education materials, the training of elections officials and the training of candidates. The month of October was used to lay the ground work for the training programs as well as to assess the state of preparedness for the election. Since less than 2,000 people registered to vote then NDI decided to target the program to reach these voters for maximum turnout. Also, NDI made the decision that to ensure a professionally run and managed election process that training for the elections staff was essential.

From November 6 to November 7, Father Michael Weeder, former head of Project Vote in South Africa, traveled to Swaziland to conduct an election assessment. The purpose of the trip was two fold. First, Father Weeder was to ascertain the state of technical preparedness for the election. Second, he was to make recommendations that would be used as a lessons learned type of report for a post-election conference funded by the United States Embassy in 1998. During his visit, Father Weeder spoke with all those who were relevant to the election process in Swaziland including the Town Council, Minister for Housing and Urban Development and potential candidates. He recommended that the

election proceed but that NDI continue assistance in all aspects to ensure a professionally run process.

On November 15, NDI and the Manzini Town Council hosted a one day workshop for potential candidates for the November 29 election. The reason why candidate training was conducted dealt with the fact that NDI became a mediating body in the electoral process. By playing a neutral role, NDI was able to keep the competing sides in the election engaged in the process. In playing this role, NDI secured the participation of the Manzini Joint Residents and Ratepayers Association in the electoral process by agreeing to hold a nonpartisan candidate training workshop. The workshop was attended by 10 of the 15 candidates standing for election. The workshop trained candidates in techniques such as getting out the vote, developing a campaign message and organizing a campaign. Arron Seboyane, a local councilor from Johannesburg, and Julie Hughes, NDI's program officer in Cape Town, conducted the workshop.

From November 21-22, NDI conducted the training of polling station staff. NDI trained the five Presiding Officers and 12 polling officers. The training was conducted by Yvette Geyer, a trained facilitator from the Institute for Democracy in South Africa, who has extensive experience in training election officials in South Africa. This training was viewed as necessary by NDI to ensure that no technical glitches occurred on election day because the Returning Officer for the elections had no formal training program.

Finally, NDI produced two sets of materials and assisted in organizing a television talk show. First, NDI developed, produced and distributed 3,000 Voting Times newspapers. The Voting Times was produced in English and SiSwati. Also, 500 posters were distributed throughout Manzini in both English and SiSwati that informed people to the time, place and day of voting. In addition, NDI sponsored a television talk show in which candidates debated issues around the election. The talk show was carried by Swazi TV and had a national audience.

ELECTION OBSERVATION DELEGATION

On November 29, NDI sent a four person observation team to the Manzini elections. The delegation was headed by Mpho Mosimane, Spokesperson for the Minister of Constitutional Development in South Africa, and included NDI staff members Raymond Schuler, Foster Mijiga and Patrick Henry. The purpose of the delegation was to observe the performance of the officials and to discourage irregularities. In this regard, the delegation issued a report saying that although

turnout was extremely low the process ran professionally and without any breakdowns or challenges.

Positive Aspects of the Electoral Process

1. The turnout of voters rose from 6 percent of registered voters in 1995 to almost 20 percent in 1997.
2. In the 1995 elections, the Manzini Joint Residents and Ratepayers Association (MAJORRA) effectively boycotted the elections while in 1997 MAJORRA participated in the entire process.
3. MAJORRA announced that the process was free and fair and accepted the results of the election, unlike their 1995 refusal to accept the results.
4. The technical aspects of the election under the authority of the Returning Officer went off smoothly and without major difficulty. The training of polling officials conducted by NDI resulted in a substantial improvement in the capabilities of elections officers.
5. Voter education occurred for the first time in a local government election in Swaziland. Unlike other competitive electoral exercises in the country both residents and non-residents had a heightened awareness of the event.

Negative Aspects of the Electoral Process

1. Low voter registration and turnout in the process was due to many factors. Most importantly, a reluctance by community groups to actively participate in the process and the passive attitudes by candidates when it came to campaigning.
2. Election was held during the rainy season in Swaziland which impacted the turnout.
3. Some aspects of the voting process such as the inking of fingers, were mysterious and maybe intimidating to voters.
4. The patriarchal nature of Swazi society recognized the senior male in a household as casting the vote for the entire family.

5. Polling stations were sometimes poorly organized, confusing voters as to the logical progression of the process in casting a ballot.

RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The results of NDI's work in Manzini cannot be measured by the voter turnout alone which by any measure was extremely low. However, NDI's efforts can be measured by the success of the process and the reaction of the key participants. The technical aspects of the election occurred without any major incidents. The Minister for Housing and Urban Development commented "One of the notable achievements of N.D.I. is that the local ratepayer association which was planning to boycott the election, changed its mind in realization of the neutrality and professional approach to the process."

Also, despite low voter turnout, the Manzini Joint Ratepayers and Residents Association declared that the voters had spoken and that the electoral process was run in a free and fair manner. Thus, even though voter turnout was low, the key role players in the process felt strongly that the election was a positive step in the road to democracy for Swaziland.

EVALUATIONS/CONCLUSIONS

This first participatory local government election in Swaziland provided valuable lessons that may be applied to future endeavors. First, voter education and assistance with registration is essential. For example, NDI found that in Swazi culture only the male heads of households actually vote. Thus, in future work, more concentrated attention must be focused on women. Second, the technical aspects of an election can be handled by the Swazis with a great deal of proficiency with the proper training. Third, candidates and campaigning are severely restricted in Swaziland and that training of candidates needs to begin up front and often.

Report on the Manzini Town Council Elections
Manzini, Swaziland
29 November 1998
Mpho Mosimane - Spokesperson Ministry of Provincial Affairs and
Constitutional Development

Introduction

The Manzini Local Government Elections would best be described as elections for a stokvel committee or an election of board members of some social club, rather than an election of a council that serves over 60,000 people.

The morning of the election day was not characterized by any feeling that usually accompanies elections, be they local, national or provincial. Simply put, there was no election vibe at all, especially the kind seen in first democratic elections. Many people did not know that there were elections taking place at all.

Observations

We arrived at the council offices only to find the gates closed and some lone official who did not know what was going on there. Many of the officials were themselves not well informed, for example, they did not know the numbers and locations of polling stations.

Many people in Manzini had no way of knowing what was going on, as there not nearly enough publicity about the elections. Even the NDI sponsored information leaflets were not well distributed due to lack of enthusiasm and discipline of both the electoral officials and candidates.

Most candidates made little or no appearances at polling stations through out the day. Also, there was no visible candidate activity in and around the polling stations. There were no candidates who were trying to encourage voters to come out and vote or even to explain issues to voters who had turned up at the voting stations. Some candidates did not show up for the counting of votes.

Needless to say, because of all the above mentioned factors the voter turnout was embarrassingly low, only roughly 200 voted out total number of roughly 1,100 registered voters.

Findings

In general the polling stations were well run. Inside the polling stations instructions for voters were not only clearly visible but also simple and easy to understand. The polling method was the usual secret ballot system with sealed and secure ballot boxes.

No major issues which could impact on election results or on the free and fairness of the elections were noted or reported. The only issues which was noticeable was that the officials did not always have sufficient information about the process.

There was no reported or evidenced instances of fraud, either by observers or candidates.

All the ballot boxes were brought to the counting station, still safely secured. They were opened and ballots were counted in the presence of all electoral officers, observers and attending candidates. The election results were announced and accepted without reservations.

B

Report on the Manzini Town Council Elections Swaziland

Introduction

This report details the outcomes of local elections held by the Manzini Town Council on 29th November 1997. The report is based on personal observations during the course of the elections as an observer and also on my interaction with voters, polling staff and an official in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development.

1. Polling Stations

Polling stations were fairly well organised with officials having a clear understanding of the voting cycle. Presiding officers were quite open to suggestions by other polling staff in instances where there was a need to rearrange the station to allow for a free flow in voting. Space in at least one polling station were very congested resulting in some voters experiencing problems in getting to cast their votes. Direction markers indicating sites of polling stations were visibly absent.

2. Polling Officials

All officials at stations showed a keen aptitude for their work and were well aware of the need to create an environment conducive for elections to take place. In speaking to these officials, it was evident that they had a very good understanding of the need for democratic governance and the importance of ensuring that elections are free and fair. Despite low turn ups at polling stations, officials were patient and remained at the stations until stipulated time.

3. Voters

In most instances voters were aware of the candidates that were standing for elections in their specific wards. Many voters however were skeptical about having their hands ink marked as proof that they have cast their vote. Greater attention should be given to this issue in future voter education campaigns.

4. Candidates

Most candidates made their rounds at polling stations. Candidates often requested Presiding Officers to check the voters register and in some instances even questioned the number of voters registered in a ward.

5. Counting procedures

All necessary counting mechanisms were firmly in place at the station. However, people observing the counting had to be reprimanded on a number of occasions by the Chief Presiding Officer due to their loud speaking and laughing. Results of the elections were received in a good spirit by all candidates that were present at the station.

6. General observations

- Just over a quarter of the 1182 registered voters actually came to vote.
- An official from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development described the turn out as "shocking" because in her opinion the necessary groundwork for elections had been laid and that there are now no excuses to be made.
- The commitment of "progressive" civil society formations such as Majorra and Trade Unions towards the democratization of Swaziland politics are questionable because of the low turnout. Trade Unions did not encourage their members to stand as candidates and neither made an active effort to promote their participation in the local elections.
- This leads to the question of whether the populace regarded the elections as illegitimate. If this indeed is the case then the low registration and actual voting comes as no surprise.
- More public education programmes and civic education need to take place in developing an more literate electorate.

C

MANZINI TOWN COUNCIL ELECTIONS

Independent Observation Report

29 November, 1997

The Manzini Local Town Council held elections for ward councilors On the 29th November 1997 and I had the privilege of being one of the only four international observers. Election monitoring by foreign nationals has proved to be a useful tool in promoting participation in electoral process by a skeptical population and international monitoring has boosted voter confidence and provides legitimization for controversial elections. Swaziland however, has a relatively different pattern of voting with various factors influencing the voting pattern.

The Manzini Town Council is divided into ----wards and representatives from these wards form the Manzini Town Council. The Manzini Town Council is responsible for the delivery of essential services just like town councils in other countries.

The voting process adopted by the Town Council conforms with the standard voting processes used in most parts of Southern Africa and this was evident through the following experience:

- the election and the law governing the election was observed and respected by all candidates
- the general organization and preparation of the election was done before the election day in accordance with the electoral laws of Swaziland
- wards were properly demarcated
- the electoral system allowed candidates to appoint agents or observers
- constantly maintained an updated complaints and irregularity register in most of the polling stations
- the election was monitored and managed by competent and trusted authorities
- voter registration attempts were made as evident in the turn out and in accordance with the law
- there was a significant level of confidentiality in the entire election process
- provided security at the polling stations
- ensured that there was no intimidation and interference of any kind.
- supplies and stationery was adequate

These procedures improved the legitimacy of the Manzini election. However, factors beyond the Town Councils control negatively affected voter turn out which by the end of the election was below 20% of the registered voters. The estimated percentage however, is an indication of a significant move towards participatory politics, considering all the different factors that led to low voter turn out.

Judging from the people who voted, more than 80% were familiar with the election process and procedures at the polling centers. There was no record of any

irregularities, interference or intimidation from the time that the ballot boxes were sealed to the time that the votes were counted except for a few complaints coming from the voters and the observations listed below:

- an estimated 70% of the women complained about dipping their fingers in ink. Reasons for this ranged from petty cleanliness to skin sensitivity.
- an estimated 60% complained about the election taking place during the rain season
- some people complained about lack of civic education. After probing, it was discovered that some families thought that it was permissible for one member of the family to bring certificates for the entire family to the polling station and vote on their behalf. They were concerned about the practicality of an entire family going out to vote.

These are just some of the issues that voters raised. Rain definitely affected the voter turn out in the election considering the fact that the election was taking place in the Town Council where an estimated 60% - 70% are working class citizens, it was unrealistic to expect them to vote on a working day. This should also take into consideration the fact that electoral politics is a new phenomenon in Swaziland and most of Southern Africa. The election in Manzini took place on a Saturday and this is a working day in Swaziland until 13:00 PM. Coincidentally it started raining before close of business that day, just one of the oversights that the town council administration could have taken into consideration when setting up the date.

On a different note, it is a given fact that the concept of electoral politics is foreign in Swaziland, there is no party politics and the King and his council are the sole rulers of the land. The political climate in Swaziland offers no better options because all the powers to make decisions are vested in the King his loyalists.

Recommendation:

Unless an extensive civic education program is introduced in Swaziland to make the people understand that their vote can make a difference, voter turn out will be poor, because the decisions makers are not regulated, replaced or accountable through the ballot box. The Swaziland tradition and the tone of the King during the 1997 State Opening of Parliament are a clear indication of the Kingdom's attitude towards political transformation. Quote:

"We think of refugees in Zaire: in the middle of fighting hundreds of miles from safety with no prospect of reaching their own homes. And, we think of the many thousands, from across the continent, who have died at the hands of their fellow countrymen as a result of internal division within their own nations. We see the cross border confrontations between countries in the horn of Africa and the suffering experienced by so many of their people as a result. While we pray for the innocent people, caught up in these crises. Let us be careful to learn from their misfortune and vow to avoid the tragic mistakes that caused it".

Foster Mijiga