# Assessing pre-election political space in the 2011 local government elections

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## Abstract

The administration of elections in South Africa, including the 2011 local government elections (hereafter the 2011 elections), has widely been hailed as a resounding success. Yet competitive elections, an essential component of any democratic system, require more than smooth running administrative systems. Competitive elections require competitive campaigns and an environment where voters can vote and express their opinions without fear of retribution. In this article, we conduct a systematic assessment of pre-election space in the 2011 elections. We present a unique coding scheme developed by the Election Monitoring Network (EMN) to grade individual instances of election-related intolerance and intimidation. The coding scheme provides a framework to quantitatively assess a given campaign and election. We also present data on instances of pre-election intimidation and violence gathered by the EMN from 3 March until 13 May. The data reveal that whilst the vast majority of South Africans can vote and express their opinions without fear of retribution, there are underlying tensions which remain a cause for concern. When viewed in conjunction with the Afrobarometer survey data (2008) on perceptions of political space in South Africa, it becomes clear that pre-election campaign space is fragile and not given, and will therefore need to be nurtured in future elections.

**Keywords:** Campaign environment, democracy, election administration, election monitoring, local government elections, South Africa

# 1  BACKGROUND

It is widely accepted that competitive elections are an essential component of democracy. Competitive elections in turn require competitive election campaigns *and* an environment where voters can vote and express their opinions without fear of retribution. Such an environment provides the basis for a campaign period which strengthens democracy by allowing competing parties to articulate their stances (Street 2001: 253); by giving citizens unfettered access to alternative sources of information, including independent media and divergent opinion (Diamond 1996: 11); and by providing incentives for people to vote. Thus, the pre-election period is of critical importance because, as Kavanagh (1995: 1) argues, campaigns 'allow voters to hear politicians defend their records, criticize those of their opponents and propose policies'. Ideally the campaign period should provide information which allows voters to evaluate their political leaders, as well as to test the worth of public policy. Mattes and Bratton (2003: 30) indicate that 'information about incumbent political leaders creates a point of vicarious contact between citizens and the political system, as well as a means by which they can better follow the process of decision-making'.  For campaigns to play this role, it is necessary to have free flow of information, open discussion and vigorous debate. It is also necessary to have an environment where voters can, without fear of reprisal or retribution due to their beliefs or affiliations, feel free to express their opinions, including those about the strengths and weaknesses of political leaders and policies, and can feel free to gather whatever information they deem relevant for their voting decision.

The Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) requires political parties to publicly commit themselves to the Electoral Code of Conduct thereby creating an environment in which all parties can campaign freely and voters can express their opinions without fear of retribution.  Indeed, all of South Africa's democratic elections to date have been declared as 'free and fair' by observer groups. Campaigning in South Africa's democratic elections has not been docile, with fierce competition displayed by all parties. This fierce competition in itself is not necessarily a problem and some would argue that it constitutes an integral and valuable part of South Africa's democratic system. However, the campaign period of democratic elections has also been characterised by hostile exchanges between political leaders and party members. There have been concerns about acts of intolerance, obstruction and intimidation including disrupted meetings and allegations of voter intimidation. This article presents a systematic assessment of the extent and severity of such instances in the run-up to the 2011 local government elections (hereafter the 2011 elections).

The Election Monitoring Network (EMN) which gathered the data presented in this article was established in 2008 and operated during the 2009 national election

(hereafter the 2009 election) as part of a civil society observer network. The EMN is a network of independent civil society organisations including the South African Council of Churches-WC (SACC-WC), the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) and the Black Sash. In 2009, the EMN used a national team of field monitors, who completed a series of training courses.

In the 2011 elections, the EMN was again accredited by the IEC to complement its formal work. The overall aim of the network was to reduce levels of conflict and violence and assist in providing credibility for the electoral process. The EMN tracked incidents of violence as well as other incidents which breached the Electoral Code of Conduct or which compromised the holding of free and fair elections. Funding constraints in 2011 meant that it was impossible to repeat the large field operation of 2009. However, the overall election monitoring infrastructure remained in place, and in the six provinces where election violence was most likely, a full time co-ordinator was in place with smaller numbers of field monitors. In order to fill in the capacity gap resulting from the smaller number of personnel, as well as to take advantage of technological developments to encourage greater public involvement in election monitoring, the EMN established an SMS hotline number (33830). Members of the public were able to report incidents which they witnessed. These incidents would then be reported to the EMN head office as well as to the Provincial Co-ordinators. The EMN developed a set of referral procedures for incidents at different levels of severity, and these did not preclude immediate referral to the police or other local agencies if the Provincial Co-ordinator felt it was warranted. Serious crises were to be referred to the Eminent Persons' Group, whose members came from different backgrounds and different parts of the country. This Group took action once during the campaign, after the death of Andries Tatane in Ficksburg in the Free State. One full-time staff member at the EMN head office took particular responsibility for liaison with security agencies, relaying information gathered by the EMN to the police and other agencies, and feeding back information provided by these agencies to the EMN for analysis. As well as gathering data and referring incidents to official agencies, EMN Provincial Co-ordinators also carried out behind-the-scenes conflict resolution work in areas which, while still peaceful, had shown clear signs of the potential to become volatile. In this assignment, the EMN was assisted by many Provincial Co-ordinators with a long track-record of community involvement and conflict resolution in their own regions.

On voting day, the EMN had additional assistance from volunteers in different parts of the country. A small call centre was established in the EMN's head office, with four additional staff being recruited for the day to assist the two full-time EMN staff members in operating it. Provincial Co-ordinators were contacted three times during the day with specific questions concerning both specific incidents and the

general atmosphere in their province. Provincial Co-ordinators were also free to call in at any other time if serious situations emerged, although this only happened once during voting day.

The data collection methods included: (1) data gathered directly by Provincial Co-ordinators and their field personnel; (2) media monitoring carried out by the EMN head office, Provincial Co-ordinators and the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA); (3) incidents reported via the SMS hotline and call centre; and (4) monitoring of social networking sites.

Two reports that analysed trends during the election campaign were produced by the EMN Analysis Hub as well as three on the day of the election itself. These reports were based on data gathered from Provincial Co-ordinators and their field personnel, the SMS hotline and media monitoring. Social networking sites were also monitored during the campaign although this only uncovered one minor incident. The three reports produced on polling day were produced on the basis of the information gathered in the call centre, as well as media monitoring and monitoring of social networking sites.

It is worth noting that most of the serious violence relating to the 2011 elections, as reported by the media, occurred during the first two months of 2011, and thus was not captured by the monitoring process. This violence was a consequence of tensions within the African National Congress (ANC) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) relating to candidate selection, with the tension within the IFP eventually becoming so serious that the party fractured. The EMN's internal reporting and analysis ran from 3 March until 13 May, which was five days prior to voting day. In the final few days, both Provincial Co-ordinators and the EMN head office focused on building their operational systems for voting day itself. By that stage, the broadly peaceful nature of the 2011 election campaign had been established.

## 2  THE EMN CODING SCHEME AND INTENSITY SCALE

The coding scheme used by the EMN aimed to ensure that any violation reported to it could be included in a database by using a simple numerical code. The core of the scheme is its 'intensity scale'. This was introduced because simply reporting the total number of incidents gives an incomplete picture. Without being able to rank incidents by intensity, there is no way to distinguish between the incidents in terms of their severity – for example, posters being removed will not be distinguishable from a political murder. In the past, this distinction had, of course, been made by qualitative narrative analysis, and this remains a useful technique in election monitoring. However, quantitative analysis can be useful, firstly, in minimising the risk of observer bias in interpreting data. Secondly, when the number of serious

incidents is large, narrative analysis that is not supported by robust analysis of quantitative data can be selective and potentially misleading.

The scheme aimed to be comprehensive enough to code any incident likely to emerge in the current South African political environment. Events on the upper-end of the intensity scale have been rare in recent South African elections. However, in South Africa's early democratic elections they were not unknown. The value of the intensity scale is that it provides the basis for a comparative assessment given that pre-election violence remains a continuing problem in many countries. The coding scheme can be used in any context and should new problems arise which are not included in the scheme, it is flexible enough to easily create new codes. The intensity scale has been drafted to be easily useable not only in future elections in South Africa, but in other countries also. The scale can not only be used for public elections, but also for internal party selection and elective processes.

The intensity scale runs from 1 to 9, with the highest number being the most serious incident. At its upper end, it lists events which would grievously threaten democracy and the rule of law. Murder on a grand scale and vote-buying on a national scale are examples of upper-end incidents. At its lower end, are those incidents that happen in almost every democracy, such as the removal of posters. While these can have other damaging consequences, they do not of themselves seriously endanger a free and fair election. However, particular concentrations of these low-level incidents can be indicative of a region where there is an elevated risk of more serious problems emerging. The scale gives examples of the sort of behaviour indicated by each level of intensity, and then links each to suggested action by the collating and responding functions of the EMN.

The full EMN Incident Coding Scheme and Intensity Scale are laid out in the addendum at the end of the chapter.

## 3  FINDINGS

The primary finding emanating from the data collected by the EMN was that the pre-election campaign environment in 2011 was a peaceful one in which voters did not have to fear acts of intolerance, obstruction and intimidation. This reflects the fact that democratic elections in South Africa have been, and continue to be, largely peaceful, albeit with isolated cases of grave violence or misconduct. Overall, the EMN's data recorded a pre-election period in 2011 that stands out in the democratic era as being particularly peaceful with minimal experience of political intolerance. However, the same cannot be said of parties' internal candidate selection processes,

which were marked by considerable tension and occasional serious violence, much of this occurring in the first two months of 2011 before the EMN became operational.

As in previous elections, the total number of reports received was not high. From 3 March until 13 May 2011, the EMN received only 80 incident reports that were serious and detailed enough to be used for quantitative analysis. This was undoubtedly a snapshot of what actually happened on the ground, particularly in relation to trivial incidents such as poster removal or non-violent, but abusive, confrontations between political rivals. It is highly likely, however, that the more serious incidents were captured almost universally. These were often reported by more than one mechanism, for example by different media channels, or by both the Provincial Co-ordinators and the press.

Although election violence was sporadic, there were definite trends to be noted, and these are examined using the data presented in the tables below. The tables reflect the EMN's analysis of hotspots; changing nature of incidents over time; evolving patterns of major causes of incidents; and inter-party disputes. The term 'total intensity' (used in the tables) refers to the simple addition of the total score on the intensity scale for each incident recorded.

Table 1 ranks the five municipalities in which the highest 'total intensity' of incidents was reported, either due to a large number of incidents or a smaller number of very serious incidents. Buffalo City (East London) was a location of enduring tension throughout the campaign, so it is no surprise to see it topping the list of municipalities for the total intensity of incidents reported during the campaign. eThekwini (Durban) also reported some serious incidents early in the campaign; however, the atmosphere improved dramatically towards the end of the campaign. There were a large number of very minor incidents reported in Cape Town and, to a lesser extent, in Johannesburg. Many of these were reported by the SMS hotline and this almost certainly reflects better penetration of the hotline number in the two largest cities.

**Table 1:** Top six municipalities by total intensity of incidents reported

| Municipality | No. of incidents | Total intensity |
|---|---|---|
| **Buffalo City** | 8 | 26 |
| **eThekwini** | 6 | 21 |
| **Johannesburg** | 7 | 18 |
| **Cape Town** | 14 | 17 |
| **Tshwane** | 3 | 10 |

Source: EMN 2011

Table 2 shows the total intensity of incidents week by week during the campaign. There were two spikes in the number of incidents reported – one in the first half of April, and the second in the first half of May. The April spike probably reflected two factors. The first was simply an operational matter of monitoring networks becoming more effective and alert as they settled down. Another better explanatory factor, however, is that inter-party competition was increasing in this period as the election campaign proper commenced, while at the same time, bad feelings about internal selection disputes were continuing. This pattern will be seen more clearly in Table 3.

It is notable that the spike in early May was as a result of many minor incidents being reported. Many of these incidents were related to posters being removed, foul-mouthed confrontations between supporters of different parties and incidents around the distribution of food parcels. Only one of these incidents was violent and even that was not remotely life-threatening. This reflected a campaigning atmosphere which was aggressive and boisterous, but not violent.

**Table 2:** Total intensity of incidents by week

| Week ending | No. of incidents | Total intensity |
|---|---|---|
| **11 March** | 4 | 14 |
| **18 March** | 2 | 6 |
| **25 March** | 2 | 6 |
| **1 April** | 5 | 23 |
| **8 April** | 12 | 27 |
| **15 April** | 12 | 45 |
| **22 April** | 8 | 21 |
| **29 April** | 7 | 15 |
| **6 May** | 18 | 27 |
| **13 May** | 10 | 14 |

Source: EMN 2011

In Table 3 below, the data were broken down to look at the changing nature of incidents over time. The incidents were categorised into fortnightly rather than weekly periods, given the small total number of data items. In the March period, the majority of incidents related to disputes around internal candidate nomination issues within the ANC. Indeed, there were some serious violent incidents related to internal selection issues during this period – one serious incident of arson in Limpopo, the death of a man in Eastern Cape and two separate conspiracies to murder in Eastern Cape and Gauteng.

In early April, the overall severity of incidents peaked as selection disputes continued while the election campaign proper matured and incidents between parties became more prominent. Internal selection issues became less common as voting day approached, although they never stopped entirely. Incidents relating to disputes between parties became more prevalent although, as noted above, many of them were trivial.

Detailed reports received by the EMN from field workers indicated an overlap between the issue of service delivery and the issue of candidate selection. A high proportion of the incidents related to internal selection problems were explicitly linked by participants to service delivery issues. Service delivery protests became a major item on the political agenda and in the news headlines during the campaign. This was most graphically captured in the death of Andries Tatane in Ficksburg (Free State), as well as the 'toilet saga' in the Western Cape, North West, and Free State.

The two incidents categorised as 'other/unknown' are worth noting. Both related to ANC councillors in KwaZulu-Natal being gunned down by unknown and clearly skilled assassins a month apart, one in Durban and the other one in Pietermaritzburg. Further information about these incidents has been difficult to come by.

**Table 3:** Total intensity of cause of incident

| Period | Disputes between parties | Internal selection problems | Service delivery issues | Campaigning beyond acceptable boundaries | Other or unknown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 March – 18 March | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| 19 March – 1 April | 11 | 10 | 4 | 4 | 6 |
| 2 April – 15 April | 23 | 26 | 20 | 7 | 0 |
| 16 April – 29 April | 13 | 16 | 3 | 4 | 0 |
| 30 April – 13 May | 26 | 7 | 6 | 2 | 0 |

Source: EMN 2011

Table 4 below examines which parties were involved in inter-party disputes. The EMN recorded 11 serious incidents – defined as having a score of 3 or more on the intensity scale – involving activists from different parties. Serious violence between parties was rare in the 2011 election campaign. Of the few incidents that did happen,

the pattern of IFP-NFP tension was clear and perhaps not surprising, given the bitter split that resulted in the birth of the National Freedom Party just a few months before the election. Despite this, narrative reports from the EMN field workers in KwaZulu-Natal consistently reported a generally peaceful atmosphere, and a much higher level of tolerance of ANC campaigning in IFP strongholds in 2011 than at any other time in the democratic era.

**Table 4:** Number of inter-party dispute incidents by total intensity of parties involved

| Parties involved | Number of incidents | Number of incidents involving violence to persons |
|---|---|---|
| **IFP and NFP** | 3 | 2 |
| **ANC and DA** | 3 | 0 |
| **ANC and IFP** | 2 | 0 |
| **ANC and COPE** | 1 | 0 |
| **Unknown (victim IFP)** | 1 | 1 |
| **Unspecified** | 1 | 0 |

Source: EMN 2011

On voting day itself there were also very few serious election-related problems. In Buffalo City, a councillor's house was burned down. In the Free State, a temporary tent voting station was burned down, but the IEC quickly moved to provide a new tent. Premises due to be used as a voting station in Limpopo were burned down the night before the election, although local sources indicated this was not caused by election-related tensions and was not a deliberate attempt to disrupt the election. In the Western Cape, a polling station in Delft was broken into the night before the elections. Most problems were more of the administrative in nature. In Soweto and surrounding areas, such as Eldorado Park and Kliptown, a shortage of ballot papers was experienced at a number of polling stations very early in the day, causing frustration among voters. More widely, there were a series of minor issues in different parts of South Africa. These included the late opening of voting stations, the late arrival of ballot papers, and parties campaigning in the immediate precincts of voting stations. According to EMN information, the IEC responded quickly to these problems, which occurred at a small minority of voting stations. There were problems with identity scanning machines in some voting stations, leading to long queues and voter frustration. A switch to manual checking of the voters' roll resolved the problem in many places. Both the IEC and the South African Police

Service (SAPS) acted swiftly to resolve issues as they occurred. Overall the election ran smoothly and took place in a peaceful, and even jovial atmosphere.

The EMN data revealed that South Africa's electoral democracy has matured significantly since 1994. In addition to an objectively free pre-election environment, it is also important that the environment be perceived as free. We now turn to perceptions about South Africa's political environment. To gauge the perceptions of ordinary South Africans about this matter, we turn to the data recorded by Afrobarometer's pre-election survey (2008) which was conducted six months prior to the 2009 election. Whilst somewhat dated, this survey provides the most relevant indicators on these issues. The overall finding was that South Africans' perceptions of their political environment were not entirely positive, especially in comparison to perceptions among citizens of Botswana, Malawi, Lesotho and Namibia.

In keeping with Afrobarometer's protocol, face-to-face interviews were conducted in 11 official languages with a nationally representative probability sample of 2 400 respondents across all nine provinces during October and November 2008. These procedures were also followed in the surveys done in Botswana, Malawi, Lesotho and Namibia.

It should be kept in mind that the survey was conducted around the time that the Congress of the People (COPE) was formed in December 2008. The campaign for the 2009 election was particularly competitive. After the formation of COPE by Mosiuoa Lekota and Mbhazima Shilowa, the country witnessed acrimonious and often hostile exchanges between it and the ANC, as well as reports of disrupted meetings and allegations of voter intimidation in the by-elections held in mid-December 2008. The 2009 election was finally recorded as a peaceful and well-administered election by the IEC and observer groups, including the EMN. The South African survey (conducted during October and November 2008 by Citizen Surveys) revealed that a significant proportion of citizens feared the re-emergence of political violence and intimidation in South Africa's electoral politics. The overall finding was that South Africans' perceptions of their political environment were not entirely positive.

When asked, 'In this country, how free are you to say what you think?' less than half (48 per cent) of South Africans said that they felt 'completely free' to say what they think. More than a quarter (28 per cent) were more circumspect and indicated that they were 'somewhat free'. Of concern is the fact that one in 10 South Africans (9 per cent) said that they were 'not free at all', while 13 per cent said that they were 'not very free'. Taken together then, about a fifth of South Africans reported not feeling confident to say what they think. The proportion of South Africans who felt 'completely free' to express themselves was also found to be much lower than that

of citizens in Botswana, Malawi, Lesotho and Namibia. It is interesting to note that 71 per cent of those surveyed in Lesotho felt completely free to express themselves.

**Table 5:** Perceptions of freedom of speech
Question: In this country, how free are you to say what you think?

|  | Botswana | Malawi | Lesotho | Namibia | South Africa |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Not at all free** | 1% | 3.9% | 8.6% | 4.9% | 9% |
| **Not very free** | 4% | 6.6% | 8.1% | 10.4% | 13% |
| **Somewhat free** | 10% | 10.2% | 9.2% | 26.4% | 28% |
| **Completely free** | 84% | 77.5% | 70.8% | 57.7% | 48% |
| **Don't know** | 1% | 1.8% | 3.3% | 0.6% | 1% |

Source: Afrobarometer 2008

A second indicator relating to freedom of political speech asked, 'In this country, how often do people have to be careful of what they say about politics?' The results revealed higher levels of caution. Only a quarter (25 per cent) in South Africa felt that they 'never' have to be careful while 27 per cent said that they 'rarely' have to do so. It is disquieting to note that one in five South Africans (22 per cent) said that they 'always' have to be careful of what they say about politics, while 21 per cent said that they 'often' have to be careful. Overall, 23 per cent of South Africans felt guarded about expressing their political opinions. On this indicator, South Africans were more positive than their counterparts in Lesotho, but were considerably more negative than those surveyed in Botswana, Malawi and Namibia.

**Table 6:** Perceptions of freedom of political speech
Question: In this country, how often do people have to be careful of what they say about politics?

|  | Botswana | Malawi | Lesotho | Namibia | South Africa |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Never** | 51% | 41.5% | 11.3% | 22.2% | 25% |
| **Rarely** | 16% | 19.4% | 17.1% | 28.8% | 27% |
| **Often** | 10% | 15.1% | 21.1% | 28.2% | 21% |
| **Always** | 18% | 20.2% | 45.2% | 18.7% | 22% |
| **Don't know** | 5% | 3.5% | 5.3% | 2.2% | 5% |

Source: Afrobarometer 2008

The indicator on freedom of association revealed a more positive result in South Africa. The majority of South Africans said that they felt free to join any political

party. Overall, 60 per cent said that they felt 'completely free' to do so, while 20 per cent said that they felt 'somewhat free'. However, it is still a concern that about one in five South Africans (18 percent) said that they felt 'not very free' or 'not at all free' to join their preferred organisation. Furthermore, this was still considerably more constrained than those surveyed in Botswana, Malawi, Lesotho and Namibia, where 93 per cent, 85 per cent, 78 per cent and 66 per cent respectively indicated that they felt 'completely free' to join any organisation.

**Table 7:** Perceptions of freedom of political association
Question: In this country, how free are you to join any political organisation you want to?

| | **Botswana** | **Malawi** | **Lesotho** | **Namibia** | **South Africa** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Not at all free** | 1% | 2.4% | 5% | 3% | 7% |
| **Not very free** | 1% | 4.1% | 5% | 8% | 11% |
| **Somewhat free** | 5% | 6.8% | 8% | 22.2% | 20% |
| **Completely free** | 93% | 85.2% | 78% | 65.8% | 60% |
| **Don't know** | 1% | 1.3% | 5% | 1% | 2% |

Source: Afrobarometer 2008

A similar pattern emerged with regard to freedom on voting day. The majority of South Africans said that they felt free to vote for the political party they preferred without feeling pressurised. Overall, 61 per cent said that they felt 'completely free' to do so, while 21 per cent said that they felt 'somewhat free'. Overall, 16 per cent of South Africans said that they felt 'not very free' or 'not at all free' to vote as they wished. Again, when compared to those surveyed in Botswana, Malawi, Lesotho and Namibia (where 94 per cent, 90 per cent, 83 per cent and 70 per cent respectively indicated that they felt 'completely free' to vote as they pleased), the finding was not that positive.

**Table 8:** Perceptions of voting freedom
Question: In this country, how free are you to choose who to vote for without feeling pressured?

| | **Botswana** | **Malawi** | **Lesotho** | **Namibia** | **South Africa** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Not at all free** | 0.4% | 1.4% | 3.4% | 1.5% | 8% |
| **Not very free** | 1% | 1.8% | 2.9% | 5.4% | 8% |
| **Somewhat free** | 4% | 5.7% | 6.6% | 21.5% | 21% |
| **Completely free** | 94% | 89.8% | 83.3% | 70.4% | 61% |
| **Don't know** | 1% | 1.1% | 3.8% | 1.2% | 2% |

Source: Afrobarometer 2008

By 2008, a sizable proportion of South Africans feared that the secrecy of their ballot could be compromised. Furthermore, South Africans expressed less confidence in ballot secrecy than they did 10 years ago. In order to find a wording for the question that was relevant across all 20 countries where the Afrobarometer survey was conducted, it was decided on: 'How likely do you think it is that powerful people can find out how you voted, even though there is supposed to be a secret ballot in this country?' The South African results revealed that just six in 10 (58 per cent) potential voters expressed confidence in the secrecy of the ballot. However, one third of all respondents felt that it was 'somewhat likely' (20 per cent) or 'very likely' (13 per cent) that a 'powerful person could find out' how they voted. An additional 9 per cent were not sure whether this was possible or not. This result revealed significantly less confidence in ballot secrecy than the outcome of a slightly differently worded question asked in an Idasa/Markinor/SABC Opinion 99 survey before the 1999 election. About two-thirds of all the respondents concluded that it was either 'not very possible' (16 per cent) or 'not possible at all' (50 per cent) for someone to find out how they marked their ballot (Mattes, Harris and Greyling: 1999). Table 9 shows that South Africans were again more negative than their counterparts in Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi and Namibia.

**Table 9:** Confidence in ballot secrecy
Question: How likely do you think is it that powerful people can find out how you voted, even though there is supposed to be a secret ballot in this country?

|  | **Botswana** | **Malawi** | **Lesotho** | **Namibia** | **South Africa** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Not at all likely** | 72% | 76.0% | 46.0% | 38.2% | 32% |
| **Not very likely** | 12% | 9.1% | 15.7% | 22.2% | 26% |
| **Somewhat likely** | 8% | 6.1% | 15.3% | 19.2% | 20% |
| **Very likely** | 4% | 5.0% | 17.7% | 9.8% | 13% |
| **Don't know** | 5% | 3.7% | 5.3% | 10.5% | 9% |

Source: Afrobarometer 2008

A particularly important question related to fear of political violence. Respondents were asked the question: 'During election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence?' Only just over a third of potential voters (38 per cent) in South Africa said that they feared it 'not at all".  More than a quarter (29 per cent) were apprehensive, saying that they feared it 'a little bit'. But approximately 30 per cent of voters said they feared it 'somewhat' (18 per cent) or 'a lot' (10 per cent).  Given the fact that in 2009, the IEC and EMN recorded a peaceful and well-administered election, it is interesting to

note that South Africans were more fearful than the citizens of Botswana, Malawi, Namibia and Lesotho.

**Table 10:** Fear of political violence
Question: During election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence?

|  | **Botswana** | **Malawi** | **Lesotho** | **Namibia** | **South Africa** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **A lot** | 3% | 20.6% | 17.7% | 10.6% | 10% |
| **Somewhat** | 4% | 12.6% | 13.5% | 23.3% | 18% |
| **A little bit** | 9% | 12.6% | 15.1% | 31.6% | 29% |
| **Not at all** | 83% | 52.6% | 50.7% | 32.2% | 38% |
| **Don't know** | 1% | 1.7% | 3.1% | 2.3% | 5% |

Source: Afrobarometer 2008

Even more telling is the fact that half of South Africans felt that competition between political parties 'always' or 'often' leads to violent conflict. On this indicator, only Botswana received a positive rating, which is hardly surprising, given the country's long history of political stability. Indeed the perception that competition between political parties leads to conflict is not entirely unwarranted. As noted above interaction between the ANC and COPE was particularly hostile in the run-up to the 2009 elections and in 2011 the split in the IFP led to several pre-election incidents of violence. In many instances campaign rhetoric was highly inflammatory with political leaders launching scathing attacks on each other. These verbal attacks were often racialised, fuelling inter-racial animosity. More systematic research is required on this issue.

**Table 11:** Perceptions of political competition between parties
Question: In your opinion, how often in this country does competition between political parties lead to violent conflict?

|  | **Botswana** | **Malawi** | **Lesotho** | **Namibia** | **South Africa** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Never** | 70% | 20.9% | 5.8% | 19.4% | 17% |
| **Rarely** | 17% | 36.7% | 21.4% | 27.4% | 28% |
| **Often** | 8% | 26.2% | 34.6% | 29.2% | 32% |
| **Always** | 3% | 13.0% | 33.2% | 20.2% | 18% |
| **Don't know** | 2% | 3.2% | 4.9% | 3.8% | 5% |

Source: Afrobarometer 2008

## 4 CONCLUSION

In general, the 2011 elections proved successful for the EMN, with a credible monitoring process being maintained despite greatly reduced outside resources. One issue that does need to be looked at for future elections is whether the monitoring process needs to start earlier, at the time that parties' internal selection processes are taking place and lists are being compiled. Media reports in 2011 showed a great deal of violence in the nomination period when both the ANC and IFP lists were finalised. Given that a position high on the list of any of the larger parties in South Africa virtually guarantees election as a representative, and that the majority of wards in municipal elections are won by either the ANC or the DA, for individual politicians the stakes in the internal selection processes are often higher than in public elections.

The importance of internal selection processes is heightened further by the fact that South Africa remains a single-party dominant system. The ANC looks set to retain an overall majority for the foreseeable future not only in the National Assembly, but it in at least seven of the nine provinces and in the majority of municipalities outside the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Therefore for the politically ambitious, in most of South Africa, internal elective processes are the key to a political career.

This raises a further question of whether democracy would be strengthened by the monitoring of internal party elective processes and not just public elections, even when these take place outside election periods. The ANC's 52nd National Conference held in Polokwane in 2007 was marked by a high degree of indecorum. The 53rd National Conference, scheduled to be held in Mangaung in December 2012, will be another landmark event in South African politics and public confidence in democratic institutions will be strengthened if it is seen to operate in a dignified and fair manner.

An unrelated but equally important question is how the use of technology will change election monitoring. In the past, a key factor in the success of any election monitoring programme was the number of trained personnel on the ground. Technology has the potential to be a game changer in allowing any member of the public to be an election monitor and report incidents which threaten the integrity of the electoral process. While potentially enhancing the sensitivity and scope of the election monitoring process, there are also potential downsides that need to be addressed.

It is unlikely that members of the public will be aware of the niceties of election law or the Electoral Code of Conduct. As a result, there is a danger that reporting mechanisms will be swamped by false positives that need to be verified by a relatively small group of trained personnel. This system could also, in theory, be 'gamed' by

unscrupulous political parties. The EMN's SMS hotline was an innovative attempt to make use of technology to improve the monitoring process. In theory it was sound, and some useful data was captured by it, but it only produced a low number of reports which were noticeably biased towards Johannesburg and Cape Town. A public reporting programme like the SMS hotline needs a reasonable amount of public exposure, through advertising in both the print and electronic media, as well as sympathetic media coverage, in order to penetrate the public's consciousness. The theory behind the SMS hotline was sound, however, and it has the potential to benefit the monitoring of future election campaigns.

The EMN did monitor social networking sites during the campaign, including the party and major candidate pages on Facebook and Twitter. This did not uncover many new incidents during the campaign, but some members of the public were attempting to engage with political parties around issues such as registration problems and problems at polling stations on voting day. The political parties did not yet seem to have the resources to respond to the public efficiently, but it shows that at least some members of the public view this as a viable communication channel which may be of use for future monitoring programmes

One final issue, which could become lost in the reporting of election monitoring, is the importance of the de-escalation and conflict resolution work carried out by EMN field personnel. While Ficksburg was a high profile successful intervention, many other interventions took place away from the public eye – indeed in places and at times where the glare of publicity would have been extremely damaging. In a number of communities across South Africa, election boycotts and threats to disrupt voting were averted, and potential disorder around candidate selection was nipped in the bud. Feedback from EMN Provincial Co-ordinators showed that many felt this to be one of the most valuable aspects of the programme, but its impact remains difficult to quantify numerically.

Finally, the data revealed a heartening picture of electoral democracy in South Africa. It is important that there is an established monitoring process. More importantly, the monitoring process revealed very few pre-election incidents of violence. The data revealed that the vast majority of South Africans may vote and express their opinions without fear of retribution. The vast majority of incidents recorded were 'low-intensity' incidents. Where serious incidents occurred they were concentrated in KwaZulu-Natal, posed no major threat to the elections, and even in KwaZulu-Natal were reported to be less prevalent than in previous elections. Overall the 2011 elections ran smoothly and took place in a peaceful, even jovial, atmosphere. However, public opinion on South Africa's pre-election political space is a cause for concern. A healthy democracy does not just require free and fair elections, they must also be *seen to be* free and fair and agreed to be so across cleavages. South Africa is

judged harshly by its electorate. Further research is required to assess whether this remains the case. In the meantime, the IEC, political parties, and other concerned organisations will need to work at re-assuring the electorate about these issues. When viewing the EMN data in conjunction with Afrobarometer survey data (2008) on perceptions of political space in South Africa, it becomes clear that pre-election campaign space is fragile and will therefore need to be nurtured for future elections.

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# ADDENDUM

## EMN Incident Coding Scheme

### Incident Number
Incident numbers are in simple serial order by province – e.g. in the Western Cape, WC001, WC002, etc.

### Date and Time
To be written in format D[D]/M[M]/YY HH:MM. Approximate times are acceptable.

### Source
1 – 7W reports
2 – Provincial co-ordinators and their EMN networks
3 – SMS hotline
4 – Press reports
5 – Electronic media reports
6 – Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) or online forums.
0 – Other

### Location
See the list of Statistics SA Municipal Codes list at Annex B.

### Perpetrator Type
1 – Elected officials
2 – Other party activists
3 – Public officials
4 – Civil society actors
5 – Non-political actors
0 – Other

### Perpetrator Affiliation
1 – ANC
2 – ANC affiliated organisations (e.g. ANCYL, MKVA)
3 – DA
4 – COPE
5 – IFP
6 – UDM
7 – VF+
8 – Other political party
21 – Civil society groups
22 – State officials
23 – Non-political actors
51 – Multiple perpetrators: ANC and DA
52 – Multiple perpetrators: ANC and IFP
53 – Multiple perpetrators: ANC and COPE
54 – Multiple perpetrators: ANC and Independents
81 – Multiple perpetrators: Intra-ANC
82 – Multiple perpetrators: Intra-COPE
0 – Other

### Incident Type
1 – Removal of posters
2 – Abusive confrontation, short of physical threats
3 – Display of weapons
4 – Threat to property
5 – Threat to personal safety
6 – Damage to property
7 – Physical assault: unarmed
8 – Physical assault: hand-to-hand weapons
9 – Physical assault: firearms
10 – Homicide
11 – Abuse of state resources for campaigning
12 – Vote buying
13 – Threats to remove or not provide services
14 – Voter intimidation: to influence how people vote
15 – Voter intimidation: to prevent people voting
16 – Voter intimidation: to force people to vote
17 – Disruption of campaign meetings
18 – Workplace attempts to prevent people from voting
19 – Landlord attempts to prevent people from voting
20 – Voting station intimidation
21 – Campaigning in an area where campaigning is known to be prohibited
22 – Vote fraud
0 – Other

### Intensity
See intensity scale chart at Annex A.

### Likely cause
1 – Disputes between parties.
2 – Internal selection problems.
3 – Service delivery discontent.
4 – Politicisation of disputes between youth.
5 – Political links with criminals.
6 – Campaigning beyond usually acceptable boundaries
0 – Other

## EMN Intensity Scale

| Rating | Physical Violence Examples | Other Examples | Actions |
|---|---|---|---|
| **9** | • **Murder on a grand scale accompanied by equivocation by political leaders.** | • **Credible threats by senior political figures to resort to nationwide violence if they are unhappy with an election outcome.**<br>• **Credible threats by senior national or provincial figures to withdraw services from all areas which vote in a particular way.** | **Instant referral onwards to senior EMN partners for immediate action by eminent persons.** |
| **8** | • **Multiple incidents of homicide in a particular locale accompanied by equivocation by political leaders.**<br>• **Murder on a grand scale even if later condemned by political leaders.**<br>• **Violent attempts to intimidate voters at voting stations on a national scale.** | • **Vote-buying on a nationwide scale.**<br>• **Attempts to prevent employees from exercising their right to vote freely by employers with a national reach.**<br>• **Credible threats by senior local political figures to resort to violence in a particular locale if they are unhappy with the local election outcome.**<br>• **Threats withdraw services from a particular neighbourhood or municipality by credible provincial or national political figures if it votes in a particular way.** | **Instant referral onwards to senior EMN partners for immediate action by eminent persons.** |
| 7 | • An isolated incident of homicide accompanied by equivocation by political leaders.<br>• Multiple incidents of homicide in a particular locale.<br>• Politically motivated homicide of canvassers or street campaigners.<br>• Disruption of meetings accompanied by homicide.<br>• Widespread politically motivated destruction of property, such as the bulldozing of an area of housing lived in mainly by supporters of a particular party.<br>• Violent attempts to intimidate voters at voting stations on a municipal scale.<br>• Attempts to intimidate voters at voting stations on a national scale, not accompanied by violence. | • Attempts to prevent employees (e.g. in a particular farm or factory) or tenants (e.g. in a particular township) from exercising their right to vote freely, by employers or landlords with a significant reach in a particular locale.<br>• An isolated case of abuse of citizen entitlements (e.g. welfare payments) to prevent people from exercising their right to vote freely or to force people to vote on a municipal scale.<br>• Threats to withdraw services from a particular neighbourhood by credible local particular figures if it votes in a particular way. | Instant referral to senior EMN partners for action within 24 hours. |
| 6 | • An isolated incident of homicide.<br>• Multiple incidents of serious assult or homicide in a particular locale.<br>• Politically motivated serious assault of canvassers or street campaigners.<br>• Disruption of meetings accompanied by serious assault.<br>• Attempts to intimidate voters at voting stations on a municipal scale, not accompanied by violence.<br>• An isolated incident of violent intimidation of voters at a particular voting station. | • Attempts to prevent a significant number of employees (e.g. in a particular farm or factory) or tenants (e.g. in a particular township) from exercising their right to vote freely.<br>• An isolated case of abuse of citizen entitlements (e.g. welfare payments) to prevent people from exercising their right to vote freely or to force people to vote on a neighbourhood scale.<br>• Abuse of state resources for campaigning on a national scale. | Referral to senior EMN partners within 24 hours for action within 72 hours. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | • An isolated incident of serious assault or attempted homicide.<br>• Serious property damage carried out in the knowledge that it carries a significant risk of grievous injury or death.<br>• Politically motivated assault of canvassers or street campaigners short of deliberate attempts to kill or seriously injure.<br>• Disruption of meetings accompanied by assault short of deliberate attempts to kill or seriously injure.<br>• An isolated attempt to intimidate voters at a particular voting station, not accompanied by violence. | • Widespread vote-buying in a particular locale.<br>• Abuse of citizen entitlements (e.g. welfare payments) to prevent people from exercising their right to vote freely or to force people to vote on a neighbourhood scale.<br>• Threats by canvassers or street campaigners that services will be withdrawn from a given area if it fails to vote in a particular way.<br>• Abuse of state resources for campaigning on a municipal scale. | Referral to senior EMN partners within 24 hours for action within one week. |
| 4 | • Displays of firearms.<br>• Physical assault short of deliberate attempts to kill or seriously injure.<br>• Serious property damage which is not a threat to personal safety (e.g. arson on buildings known to be unoccupied).<br>• Disruption of meetings accompanied by minor physical assault (e.g. aggressive jostling or pushing). | • Isolated attempts to prevent individual employees or tenants from exercising their right to vote.<br>• Abusive confrontations encouraged or taken part in by senior figures in national party hierarchies. | To be flagged within that week's narrative report and reported to the relevant provincial IEC. |
| 3 | • Displays of non-firearm weapons such as knives or clubs.<br>• Minor property damage such as stone-throwing or scratching or painting cars.<br>• Threats to personal safety.<br>• Minor physical assault (e.g. aggressive jostling or pushing).<br>• Attempts to disrupt meetings accompanied by threats. | • Isolated incidents of vote buying.<br>• Individual cases of abuse of significant amounts of state resources (above R10 000) for campaigning. | To be flagged within that week's narrative report and reported to the relevant provincial IEC. |
| 2 | • Removal of posters.<br>• Non-violent attempts to disrupt meetings.<br>• Threats to damage property. | • Abusive confrontations encouraged or taken part in by senior figures in local party hierarchies.<br>• Individual cases of abuse of petty amounts of state resources (up to R10 000) for campaigning. | To be part of quantitative trends analysis. |
| 1 | | • Abusive confrontations beyond the confines of legitimate political debate, particularly if accompanied by racially loaded or other prejudiced language.<br>• Withdrawal of private services (e.g. service in shops) to supporters of a particular party.<br>• Campaigning in an area where campaigning is known to be prohibited. | To be part of quantitative trends analysis. |