

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS FOR VOTER REGISTRATION STRATEGY

The statistical analysis of local social and electoral profiles identified a substantial ‘registration gap’ among disadvantaged rural residents. This chapter focuses on implications for improving the accessibility of the electoral process. It outlines a strategy to lower the unusually steep obstacles to voter participation in disadvantaged rural areas. It emphasizes geographically targeted, practical measures to reduce the registration gap—bringing the registration rate for disadvantaged rural residents much closer to that for the rest of the South African electorate. The approach does not require weakening existing commitment to rigorous electoral procedures. Instead, it advocates complementary actions to ensure that procedural rigour does not unintentionally discourage the participation of many disadvantaged voters. Voter participation is the ‘raw material’ of any system of democratic electoral politics. Reducing practical barriers to participation will improve the translation of South Africans’ formal political rights into substantive contributions to the ‘deepening’ of the country’s democracy.

The outlined strategy is informed by two major empirical findings of the study. First, the emphasis on voter registration stems from the results of the national sample survey and focus groups, which have

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shown that the registration process is widely viewed as the steepest practical hurdle prospective South African voters face. Second, the emphasis on targeting disadvantaged rural communities stems from the finding of the statistical analysis of local profiles that rural residence is the main social factor linked to low registration among disadvantaged individuals. Beyond identifying registration difficulties experienced by this segment of the electorate, the statistical analysis also produced estimates of the registration gap in specific localities—allowing geographic targeting of registration efforts to the areas where they are needed most.

The remainder of this chapter consists of three sections. The first outlines the study's implications for devising a strategy to reduce the registration gap among disadvantaged rural residents. Setting key financial and operational parameters for such a strategy requires policy decisions by electoral authorities, but the study helps to outline some important principles. Specifically, the study yields local information about the registration gap that can significantly improve the effectiveness—and cost effectiveness—of efforts to improve the registration rate of disadvantaged rural residents. The second section of the chapter discusses practical uses of information contained in the atlas of local registration. This includes guidance on the allocation of resources and effort to municipalities, and on targeting within municipalities by municipal electoral officers (MEOs). A map and table for one municipality are extracted from the atlas and discussed, illustrating 'hands-on' applications to operational preparations for future elections. The third section is a brief conclusion.

OUTLINE OF A REGISTRATION STRATEGY

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The study's findings help outline a strategy to reduce the 'registration gap' among disadvantaged rural residents—which could complement more conventional preparations for the 2004 national election. The rationale would be to ensure that efforts to institutionalize rigorous electoral procedures do not have the unintended effect of entrenching unusually steep practical obstacles to the participation of disadvantaged rural dwellers. The findings do not imply specific prescriptions about the amount of resources or effort that should be devoted to such a strategy, nor do they prescribe the degree of 'formality' with which the strategy should be pursued—for example, whether it should be given formal programmatic status or should be pursued more informally. These issues would require policy decisions by electoral authorities—based on considerations such as the priority given to reducing the registration gap compared with other priorities, the cost of specific activities that might be undertaken, and the availability of resources and personnel. Whatever decisions are made on these issues, the recommended principles and features will improve the effectiveness and cost effectiveness of such a strategy.

The study's key implications for devising a strategy to reduce the registration gap are as follows:

to focus on practical measures to improve the accessibility of voter registration facilities (and information) to disadvantaged rural residents. The report has shown that unusually low registration within this segment of the electorate is linked to difficulties of sparse settlement patterns and weak physical and administrative infrastructure. Measures to reduce the registration gap should address these difficulties directly—for example, through the expanded use of mobile registration stations, or even door-to-door campaigns.

to target the strategy geographically—using local estimates of

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'registration gap' to allocate resources and effort across and within municipalities. Considerable improvements in the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of the strategy can be achieved by targeting allocations to localities where the registration gap is most severe. (The information required is contained in the atlas of local registration estimates and is discussed in the next section of this chapter.)

to monitor and assess the strategy's impact through ongoing analysis of registration and participation patterns among disadvantaged rural residents. The registration gap is a 'moving target' and needs to be monitored. A systematic review should be conducted following the 2004 national election (ideally informed by 2001 census data). In preparation for the 2005 municipal election, participation patterns in the preceding municipal election of 2000 should be analysed.

USING LOCAL REGISTRATION ESTIMATES

The analysis of local electoral and social profiles produced estimates of registration rates for disadvantaged individuals in every locality (usually ward) countrywide. Beyond clarifying the social bases of registration patterns nationally, the analysis also yields local detail that is potentially very useful for electoral management and administration. Like any statistical estimates, this local information is subject to 'margins of error'. These differ by ward, but average about plus or minus 6 percent.¹ The

¹The average error margin uses a 90 percent confidence level, with localities weighted by disadvantaged rural population. The estimated registration rate for disadvantaged rural residents in each locality is based on one thousand simulations generated from the ecological inference model. For comparison, while a successful sample survey might achieve an error margin of plus or minus about 3 percent for *national* registration, error margins in the atlas average plus or minus 6 percent *for each of 2949 localities*. Aggregating the atlas's local estimates to the national level, the error margin on the registration rate for disadvantaged rural residents is plus or minus about 1 percent.

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atlas of local registration estimates presents these figures in simple maps and tables, organized by municipality. This information has two main applications in devising a strategy to reduce the registration gap—the first in guiding the allocation of resources and effort from the national and provincial levels to municipalities, and the second in guiding registration activities within individual municipalities.

Allocations from national electoral authorities to provincial and municipal officers can be based on estimates of the local registration gap—defined analogously to the national gap. For each locality, the percentage shortfall between a national registration benchmark (the registration rate for the voting-age population excluding disadvantaged rural dwellers) and the estimated local registration rate for disadvantaged rural residents is multiplied by the local population of disadvantaged rural residents. This gives the additional number of disadvantaged rural residents in the locality who would have to register to meet the national registration benchmark. (Localities with no disadvantaged rural residents—and localities where estimated registration for disadvantaged rural residents exceeds the national benchmark—are assigned values of zero.²) This ‘local registration gap’ can be treated as an ‘allocation weight’ in distributing resources or effort. For example, if a locality’s allocation weight equals 0.1 percent of the sum of all local allocation weights nationally, its share of national budget dedicated to reduce the registration gap would also be 0.1 percent. By the same logic, the allocation to a municipality could be based on the sum of the allocation weights of all localities within its boundaries. Using local registration

²Because some localities exceed the national benchmark but are not assigned a ‘negative’ local participation gap, the sum of all of the ‘gaps’ calculated locally (1.00 million) slightly exceeds the ‘gap’ calculated nationally (0.83 million). The difference has no particular substantive interpretation. The ‘national gap’ remains the most appropriate measure at the national level, while the ‘local gaps’ are the most appropriate measures for guiding allocations to individual localities.

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estimates to target municipal allocations has the advantage of directing resources to areas where the registration gap is most severe—improving the strategy’s effectiveness and cost-effectiveness.

The local estimates can also be used to help implement a targeted registration strategy within municipalities. As registration estimates have been calculated for 2949 localities and South Africa has 284 municipalities, each MEO can access information on about ten geographic subunits within his or her jurisdiction. Just as allocations across municipalities can be informed by the registration estimates, allocations among localities within municipalities also can. For individual municipalities, the practical value of the local registration estimates can be enhanced using colour-coded maps that draw attention to areas where the registration gap is most severe. The atlas of local registration estimates that follows this chapter contains a table and at least one map for every municipality countrywide.

To illustrate how this information can be used, consider one arbitrarily chosen municipality—the Zeerust local municipality in the Northwest Province, along the Botswana border. Table 4 contains information on the registration of disadvantaged rural residents in fifteen localities within the municipality, along with summary statistics. The first column contains the ward code used by the Municipal Demarcation Board. The second contains the estimated registration of voters in the target category (that is, disadvantaged rural residents) relative to that national benchmark. The third contains the voting-age population of disadvantaged rural residents. The fourth contains the ward allocation weight—calculated by multiplying the participation shortfall in the second column times the number of voters in the target category in the third column. This allocation weight is equal to the ‘local registration gap’. The fifth column expresses the ward allocation weight as a percentage of the municipal total. At the bottom of the table the total municipal

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allocation weight is presented, also expressed as a percentage of the provincial (Northwest) allocation and the national allocation.

The table gives a good overview of the challenges for the Zeerust Local Municipality in improving the registration of disadvantaged rural residents. The figures at the bottom of the table show the municipality's recommended allocation would equal 3.08 percent of the Northwest provincial allocation, or 0.35 percent of the national total. Within the municipality, three wards with allocation weights of more than 700 stand out as major priorities—NW_1859 (844), NW_1856 (744), and NW_1855 (736). In each of these wards, estimated registration for disadvantaged rural residents is roughly 20 percent below the national benchmark. Another ward—NW_1865—has a similar

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Table 4. Municipal participation, Zeerust local municipality (Northwest Province)

locality code	est. participation of voters in target category as % relative to national benchmark	number of voters in target category	ward allocation weight	ward allocation as % of municipal total
NW_1855	-18.0	4028	736	21
NW_1856	-19.0	3912	744	21
NW_1857	0.9	2640	0	0
NW_1858	-5.2	2472	129	4
NW_1859	-25.0	3318	844	24
NW_1860	6.8	2227	0	0
NW_1861	3.1	3070	0	0
NW_1862	-0.8	2791	21	1
NW_1863	-0.3	5223	15	0
NW_1864	-9.2	3957	363	10
NW_1865	-20.0	2035	402	11
NW_1866	-6.8	1469	99	3
NW_1867	-8.9	1076	95	3
NW_1868	-4.2	2933	124	3
NW_2959	3.8	3933	0	3
Municipal totals			3572	100.0
Municipal allocation as % of provincial		3.08		
Municipal allocation as % of national		0.35		
<p>'Voters in the target category' refers to voting-age rural population with less than grade 9 education. 'Localities' generally correspond with individual electoral wards (and district management areas). By definition, localities with participation above the national benchmark for voters in target category receive no allocation.</p>				

shortfall and merits attention, but its allocation weight is lower due to smaller population. Four wards have allocation weights of zero, because their estimated registration rate among disadvantaged rural dwellers exceeds the national benchmark slightly.

A different perspective on registration patterns can be gained from the colour-coded municipal map. The municipal boundaries are thick black lines, with rich red, yellow, and green colouring for the Zeerust municipality. (The paler shading is for adjacent municipalities, which are

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the focus of their own maps.) The colour-coding distinguishes wards based on whether their registration rate for disadvantaged rural dwellers is at or above the national benchmark (green), less than 10 percent below the benchmark (yellow), or 10 percent or more below the benchmark (red). Wards are labelled using the last four digits of the ward codes from the table.

The map shows a clear geographic pattern in the registration gap in the Zeerust municipality. Two of the most problematic wards (NW_1855 and NW1856) account for most of the northern half of the municipality—stretching to the Botswana border near Gaborone. Other ‘red’ wards with low registration rates include NW_1859 and NW_1865 in the southwest (NW_1864, located between these two, was also identified in the table as a ward with a large allocation weight). Meanwhile, a band of ‘green’ wards stretches across the southern portion of the municipality, with many adjacent ‘yellow’ wards having comparatively small allocation weights. With the municipal table and map, the Zeerust MEO would possess very useful ‘baseline’ information in devising a targeted registration strategy to reduce the registration gap in the municipality.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined a recommended strategy to reduce the ‘registration gap’ among disadvantaged rural residents. Such a strategy would complement other, more conventional, election preparations. Moreover, defining key parameters of such a strategy would require substantive policy decisions by electoral authorities—who must ultimately balance multiple priorities and the availability of financial resources and personnel. The chapter has nevertheless sought to clarify the practical

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value of the study's findings for the 'hands-on' tasks of electoral management and administration. Specifically, it has illustrated how local registration estimates can be used to target the allocation of resources and effort across and within municipalities—improving the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of efforts to reduce the 'registration gap.' The chapter used one arbitrarily chosen example—the Zeerust local municipality—but comparable information for every South African municipality is contained in the atlas of local registration estimates that follows the end of the report.