

**‘Traditional Authority’ and Governance in the Emjindini Royal Swazi Chiefdom,
Barberton, Mpumalanga:
An empirical study¹**

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Professor Robert Thornton,
Department of Social Anthropology, School of Social Science,
University of the Witwatersrand

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Abstract

A survey of local opinion about the value of the chiefship, municipal government, and national government reveals that there is a remarkable resurgence of support for the institution of chiefship in post-Apartheid South Africa. This research, conducted as part of large study in a predominantly Swazi-speaking area of Mpumalanga Province, South Africa, shows that support for the chief is relatively insensitive to most other sociological factors including sex, age, language, income, employment status, religious or political-party affiliation. Although there is no statutory basis for chiefs to exert any real political power in contemporary, post-Apartheid South Africa, this survey shows that a large percentage of people still expect the chief to provide many political goods and services including democratic government. This paper presents the empirical data that demonstrates the existence of a strong positive assessment of the chiefship in general, and argues that this rests partly on historically rooted practices of resistance to the state, but also on an assertion of local African political and cultural ideals against the modernising and distant authority of the South African state.

The Emjindini Swazi Chiefdom

The Emjindini Chiefdom comprises the town and townships of Barberton, and surrounding lands to the west of the urban area. The chiefship lies more or less between the northern border of Swaziland in the area to the west and north of Piggs Peak (Swaziland) and the uMlambongwane or Kaap Rivier. It is situated approximately 50 km to the south of Nelspruit, Mpumalanga, and around the current town of Barberton. The Swazi chiefdom of Emjindini was located at ‘Moodies Farm’, the site of Barberton’s first gold strike, and remained there until 1924, when it was moved to the farm ‘Glenthorpe 184’, and from there was moved to the farm Sutherland 322 in 1946. The chief’s house currently stands on a farm that the chief says is called ‘Landgoed’, purchased by the Department of Land Affairs in 1998(?) from the previous white owner. Thus, the current ‘tribal authority’ lies to the south west of Barberton town. It is separated from the town by the large Barberton Prison and prison farm, but is close enough to the town (4 kms) that it is roughly contiguous with the sprawling township that lies outside of the formerly ‘white’ town of Barberton. The

¹ Research was supported by a grant from the Canadian IDRC, administered through the Traditional Authorities Applied Research Network (TAARN), and by the South African National Research Foundation (NRF). The TAARN project comprises a large comparative study of chiefship in Ghana, Botswana and South Africa, directed by Don Ray of the University of Calgary. Prof. Tim Quinlan of the University of Durban-Westville directs the South African project. Additional funds were provided by a grant from the South African National Research Foundation.

Emjindini chief says that the township falls within his domain. Conversely, the Barberton municipality also considers the township and the chiefship to fall under its authority. Neither one, however, succeeds in providing significant services. After the demarcation of new municipal boundaries in 2000, both are included in the new municipality called Umjindi.

The Barberton townships consist of New Village, the first black township on the northern edge of the previously ‘white’ Barberton municipality, plus multiple ‘extensions’ of more recently surveyed and demarcated ‘black’ township areas. There are also a ‘Coloured’ area and an Indian area on either side of the main road coming into Barberton from Nelspruit. Residential segregation is still firmly in place despite the presence today of a black mayor and town council. The politics of the townships is dominated by the ANC, which virtually all township residents support.

This research was conducted, in part, to determine the level of support for the current chief and for chiefship in the South African lowveld. In order to assess this, however, support for the municipality, for political parties and for ‘government’ (*hulumende*) was also assessed. Based on a questionnaire that was developed by Barbara Oomen for her earlier research in Sekhukhuneland, the current research aimed to develop data that would be formally comparable with Oomen’s data for Hoepakranz and Mamone in Sekhukhuneland.² Additional research, using the same questionnaire, has now also been conducted in Dan village in the Tsonga-speaking area³ adjoining Tzaneen, in the Barolong boo Rashidi chiefship near Mafikeng,⁴ and in two additional villages, Mafefe and Pahla Manoge in Pedi-speaking Sekhukhuneland.⁵ Once this data has been fully computerised and analysed, we will be able to offer a broad comparative perspective on chiefship in these communities. This will cover a Swazi chiefdom (Emjindini under Chief Kenneth Dlamini), a Tsonga chiefship (Dan village under Chief Mhlaba, several Pedi chiefships in Sekhukhuneland (Mafefe and Pahla Manoge, and the Tswana chiefship of the Barolong boo Ratshidi. These chiefships were all formerly situated in different Homelands during the Apartheid period, including Kangwane (Swazi), Gazankhulu (Tsonga), Lebowa (Pedi, or Northern Sotho), and Bophutatswana (Tswana). Today, they also lie in three different provinces including Mpumalanga (Emjindini), Northern Province (Dan Village, Mafefe, and Pahla Manoge) and Northwest Province (Mafeking and Barolong boo Ratshidi ‘Tribal Authority’). Since each homeland administration utilised the chiefship in different ways, this will provide comparative empirical data on how it has fared since the end of the homelands and the beginning of democratic government under the ANC administration. Here, however, I deal only with the data from Barberton and Emjindini Tribal Authority in Mpumalanga.

The Emjindini chiefship’s ruling family is Nkosi (*isibongo*), although they are addressed as Dlamini *wakunene*, ‘of the right hand’, that is, of the Swazi Royal family. The family acknowledges the current Swazi king, King Mswati III as their senior head. Although they are South African, the Swazi chiefs of the area make frequent visits to the Royal Swazi palace in Swaziland to consult with the King of Swaziland, and consider themselves to be part of a trans-national royal family that includes both Swaziland and South African chiefs and

² Barbara Oomen is based at the Van Vollenhofen Institute for Non-western Law, Rijkuniversiteit van Leiden, Netherlands. The questionnaire instrument is used with her permission. It was translated into Swazi, Tsonga and Tswana for the purposes of this study, and partially modified in response to differing local social and cultural conditions.

³ Research in Dan Village near Tzaneen was conducted by my MA student, Mr. Joseph Nkuna.

⁴ Research in Mafikeng in the Barolong boo Ratshidi chiefship was conducted by my BA Honours student, Mr. Kereng Kgotleng.

⁵ Research in Sekhukhuneland was conducted by my student in Development Studies, Mr. Phahlana Magoseng.

Dlamini royal family in South Africa and Swaziland. At the end of December 2001, the South African Council of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (CONTRALESA) convened a meeting on this issue in Piet Retief, a town to the south of Swaziland along its border with the South African Province of KwaZulu-Natal. They claimed that the ‘partition’ of South Africa by its ‘colonial masters’—that is the creation of Swaziland as a Protectorate under the British Crown in the nineteenth century—deprived Swazis living in South Africa of their ‘right of being ruled by King Mswati III.’⁶ According to the CONTRALESA spokesman, Lazarus Hlophe,

The Zulus have their own *emakhosi* [chiefs] and *Silo Semabandla* [King of the Nation’], the ruling African National Party leaders have their own *emakhosi*, but when it comes to us Ngwanes [Swazis], we are denied that privilege and right. ... We must be clearly understood here that we want what belongs to us as per the South African constitution, and nobody has the right to deny us that constitutional right.’⁷

It will seem paradoxical to the outside observer that citizens of South Africa should think they have a constitutional right to be ‘ruled’ by the Swazi king who is, after all, a foreign monarch. No contemporary national constitution can, in fact, permit such a claim. However, under Apartheid’s ‘homeland’ system of government, the South African government did indeed create independent ‘tribal homelands’ that were ruled—in terms of the ruling fiction—by ‘foreign’ heads of state and governments. For Transkei, Bophutatswana, Ciskei and Venda, an entire diplomatic apparatus was set up to assert the foreign-ness of designated portions of South Africa’s own citizens. For other homelands that elected not to take ‘independence’, such as the Swazi homeland of KaNgwane, the degree of supposed autonomy that they had from South Africa meant, in fact, only misrule, corruption and poverty.

While the leaders of these political entities may have suspended their disbelief in order to rule these political fictions, they did not stop thinking that they were South Africans. Nor do South African Swazis (or ‘Ngwanes’) who wish to be ‘ruled’ by King Mswati III imagine that they are not South Africans. Rather, they exist, like all South Africans, in a political environment in which the boundaries of the political community are as much contested as any of the political goods and goals that might be contested within some political community.

Swaziland, and Lesotho—the two already independent entities effectively within South Africa’s borders and under its influence—created partial precedents for the homelands of Apartheid. The homelands, in turn, created the precedent for the demands made by the Swazi chiefs and CONTRALESA at the end of 2001 that the Swazi King rule them notwithstanding their status as South African citizens. Indeed, they even claimed it was their constitutional right. ‘The only right they have [in South Africa]’, they complained, ‘is that of belonging to political parties’, and they demanded their right to be Swazis as a matter of ‘freedom of expression’, a right that is indeed guaranteed by the South African constitution. The right to ‘be Swazi’, however, entailed being ruled by a Swazi king, namely King Mswati III of Swaziland. While this is certainly not the view held by all Swazis in South Africa, it probably touches a chord in many of them. What is at issue, evidently, is not national sovereignty and political-jural power, but rather identity, or what is more broadly called ‘culture’ in South Africa. As an advisor to King Mswati said to me while we were discussing some details of

⁶ ‘Swazis living in SA eager to see border adjustment issue resolved’, *Times of Swaziland*, Monday, 31 December 2001, p. 8.

⁷ *Times of Swaziland* 31/12/01 p.8.

intrigue around the performance of the annual *incwala* ‘first fruits’ ceremony, ‘Culture is our politics!’

Chief Kenneth Dlamani of Emjindini participates in royal rituals such as the annual *incwala* (‘First Fruits’) and the Reed Dance. Representatives of the King’s regiments send word to him in South Africa that he must come to Swaziland to participate in this ritual of annual renewal of the king’s power. He drives to Swaziland where he puts on his *majobo*, the antelope-skin loincloths, and other items of traditional Swazi warrior’s dress, picks up his cow-hide shield, spear and stick, and joins his Swazi regiment to ritually renew the kingship. This is called ‘culture’, but it is also clearly politics. Here the boundaries of western intellectual concepts break down. While ritually renewing the power of the Swazi king—and through this act, his own Swazi-ness—he is also a South African chief paid by the South African government. His role in South Africa makes him a significant participant across the Swaziland border, while his role in the Swazi kingship ritual makes gives him political capital in South Africa. The national boundary, in effect, potentiates the power of both King and chief—but makes ambiguous the limits of political community.

Kenneth Dlamini is the son of the previous chief, Mhola, who is descended from previous King Mswati II of Swaziland.⁸ The Emjindini chief, however, is also a member of the House of Traditional Leaders of Mpumalanga Province, South Africa, and is paid by the South African government. The trans-national affiliation, therefore, is somewhat precarious since there is no basis in South African law or previous custom for such alliances. Nevertheless, where linguistic and cultural areas are bisected by national borders, as is the case for the Tswana people (SA and Botswana), the Swazi (SA and Swaziland), and the Tsonga (SA and Mozambique), trans-national cultural affiliation are maintained and considered to over-ride country boundaries in matters of ‘tradition’ and cultural identity. In Mozambique, however, the FRELIMO government effectively eliminated the institution of chiefship, so there are no alliances of chiefs across the South African/Mozambique border. Tsonga chiefs in South Africa, however, actively recruit Mozambican refugees and migrants to their own followings in order to improve their own local political position.

According to Nduna (headman) Joseph Shongwe, the chiefdom was established by Mswati II of Swaziland, who established kraals for three of his wives in the area: one at Emjindini, one at ‘Mbhuleni’, and the third at ‘Mekemeke’. The Swazi first came to the area around 1865, having settled there after their defeat by the Sotho (Pulana) people at Mholoholo Mountain (along the Drakensberg escarpment between Acornhoek and Hoedspruit).⁹ ‘Emjindini’ is said to mean ‘We are not returning’ or ‘we stay here’ because the remainder of the regiment that fled the Mholoholo battle after their defeat were afraid to return to Swaziland for fear of being punished by the Swazi King.

The current chief, Kenneth Dlamini, only recently took up the chiefship some ten year after the death of his father. He moved to land that had been purchased in the late 1990s from two white farmers, and re-instituted the chiefship as a institution after the interregnum left by his father. Although the chiefship had been part of the Kangwane Homeland system, in the early nineties it had virtually ceased to function. The current chief Kenneth Dlamini, together with his *indunas* (‘headmen’) and councillors, wishes to re-invigorate the chiefship despite the ambivalent support from the South African government and the lack of any formal legal or

⁸ Mhola’s father, Matsafeni, was the son of Yoyo, the second [?] wife of Mswati II.

⁹ A C Myburgh, ‘The Tribes of the Barberton District’, Ethnological Publications, no. 25, Department of Native Affairs, Union of South Africa, 1949. p. 32.

constitutional legitimacy. Administratively, the chiefship includes the chief, twelve councillors (of whom four are women), five (?) *indunas* and two ‘tribal police’. South African government pays only the chief.

The questionnaire data suggests that there is considerable support in the Emjindini area for this chief, and for the institution as such. Forty-three percent¹⁰ of the respondents in Emjindini Tribal Authority claimed that they ‘supported the chief’ (*uyayisekela nkhosi?*), while an even higher 52% claimed that they supported the institution of chiefship (*Ucabanga kutsi bukhosi emphakatsini buyintfo lenhle?*).¹¹ Declared support for the chief is even higher in the Barberton townships at 85%.¹² Against this, only 31% of all respondents in Emjindini and the townships expressed an opinion that the municipal government was ‘good’ or ‘very good’, while 61% were either neutral (21%) or did not express an opinion at all (40%).¹³

Despite the lack of constitutional or legal support for the chiefship as a political institution, and the lack of any directly observable economic or social benefits deriving from the chief himself, it is clear that the chief has a high level of expressed support in this community. The current chief has done nothing for the community so far—except for the fact that he and his supporters successfully lobbied the Department of Land Affairs to purchase two large farms—and the data shows a great diversity of opinion about what the chief ought to be doing. Indeed, few seem to know precisely what the chiefship should do or how it should do it.

The high level of support for the chiefship is contrary to many prognostications about the future of the chiefship after the end of Apartheid, and flies in the face of government policy that seeks to downgrade or eliminate the influence of the chiefs as much as possible. Moreover, support for the chief and the chiefship is considerably greater than support for the municipal local government despite the fact that the vast ANC majority of these communities elected its members. Eighty-four percent of respondents declared support for the ANC, with only a few people declaring support for the IFP, the DA, the PAC. Only 3% declined to declare support for any party. Virtually all, therefore, see themselves as participants in a national politics as well as a local one. In addition, the Swazi people, and their chiefs in particular, also participate in a trans-national politics of cultural identity across the South African-Swaziland border.

The Emjindini population is almost entirely Swazi speaking, with small numbers of Tsonga and Pedi speakers among them, but there is a strong sense of a *local identity*—whether or not this is associated with the chiefship, with ‘Swazi-ness’ or with their particular place in this lowveld social and its complex political environment. For virtually all residents, this sense of local identity seems to go with the ‘tradition’ of chiefship. This study seeks to examine the social context of this broad support for the chief and for the institution of chiefship in Umjindi (Barberton/Emjindini), and to suggest reasons for this—apparently paradoxical—high level of support for the chief and the institution of chiefship in general.

¹⁰ N=260; with 8 persons or 3% saying ‘don’t know’ or data missing.

¹¹ Specifically, the 52% reflects those who say the institution is ‘good’ or ‘very good’ of those who expressed an opinion for the total N=260 of Emjindini. However, 14.2% preferred to remain ‘neutral’ on this measure, while 19.2% refused to express an opinion at all, that is 33.5% of the total sample either had no opinion or did not wish to express one. If this is taken into account, then only 42% felt the institution was either ‘good’ or ‘very good’ for the population of Emjindini as a whole, that is, approximately the same number that expressed support for the chief himself.

¹² N=75, with 2 cases (3%) showing ‘don’t know’ or where data is missing.

¹³ N=335.

Methodology

Current research on this chiefdom is based on a questionnaire originally developed by Barbara Oomen of the Van Vollenhofen Institute for Comparative Law at the University of Leiden, Netherlands.¹⁴ The questionnaire used in Emjindini and Barberton townships was translated into Swazi (*SiSwati*) from Oomen’s English version of the questionnaire, with modification deriving from cultural differences in the Swazi area. For instance, Oomen questionnaire asked questions about initiation and about a vigilante organisation, *Mapogo a Mathimaga* that was active in the Pedi-speaking area in Sekhukhuneland where her research had been conducted. Neither existed in the Barberton area, so these questions were dropped from the Swazi version of the questionnaire.¹⁵ Questions about the genealogical and political distance from the chief that were appropriate in the Pedi context were also modified for the Swazi context of Barberton where the social position of the chief is much less elaborate than it is in either Swaziland itself, or in Sekhukhuneland. Barbara Oomen also provided the SPSS data dictionary and coding sheet that she had used in her analysis of her data set. This was also modified for the Emjindini/Swazi data set.¹⁶

I trained four local Swazi-speaking residents to administer the questionnaires: Zelda Gama, Winnie Khanyile, Selina Shongwe and Thokozane Tsabetsa. These researchers all assisted in the translation of the questionnaire. All had high-school qualifications and were also fluent in English. Winnie, Selina and Thokozane administered the questionnaire in the tribal-trust area on the farms, while Zelda administered a set of questionnaires in the Barberton township area. My time was limited in Barberton due to teaching obligations, so I was only able to accompanying the researchers during initial administration of the questionnaires. I felt confident that they were competent, and thus left them to carry out the administration in their assigned areas.

The questionnaire was administered in two distinct areas. While the chiefship of Emjindini includes the municipal area of Barberton (and vice versa), there is a large difference in education, economic level and lifestyle between the rural farm area around the chief’s residence west of Barberton, and the townships of Barberton itself. The questionnaire was administered in the oldest township of Barberton, New Village, and in Extensions 9, 10 and 11 of the Umjindi (Barberton) municipality township area. Extensions 9 and 10 include RDP¹⁷ housing (minimal government-provided housing of 2 rooms), while extension 11 comprises mostly shacks. Residences in New Village, on the other hand, are well established and date back to the 1930s when Paulus Nkosi, a builder and member of the Swazi royal

¹⁴ Barbara Oomen developed this instrument for use in her PhD research in two communities in Sekhukhuneland, Mamone and Hoepakranz. Oomen had written the questionnaire in English, then translated it into Pedi for use during her research on chiefship in two communities, Hoepekranz and Mamone, in Sekhukhuneland in Northern Province. After reading her work, I asked if I might utilise the questionnaire in order to gather comparative data from the communities and my students and I were studying. She consented to the use of the questionnaire under conditions that her copyright was acknowledged, and that the University of Leiden and the Van Vollenhofen Institute was acknowledged in all publications. I gratefully acknowledge her authorship.

¹⁵ They were included, however, in the Tzaneen, Sekhukhuneland and Mafikeng questionnaires that are part of the larger study since initiation is practiced in these areas, and the vigilante organisation, Mapogo, is active.

¹⁶ For instance, Pedi words such as *kgosi*, ‘chief’ was translated to the Swazi *nkhosi*. Words for ‘magistrates court’, ‘chiefs court’ and other translations had to be made as well.

¹⁷ RDP (Reconstruction and Development Plan) was introduced in 1994 as the primary national development plan inspired by a populist sentiment and desire for ‘reconstruction’ after the demise of Apartheid. Its primary result was a national housing plan that provided cheap housing throughout the country for poorer people. It was abandoned in 1996 in favour of GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution), a fiscally conservative plan formulated in response to IMF pressure and global financial crisis in other ‘emerging market’ countries such as Mexico and Thailand. Today, ‘RDP’ survives only in the on-going provision of cheap housing that is known as ‘RDP housing’.

family, established this ‘black’ area of Barberton.¹⁸ This area consists mainly of long-established freehold tenure plots and housing for black Africans in Barberton. Thus, the questionnaire coverage included a wide range of types of accommodation, life styles and identities

Here, I shall refer to the rural tribal area around the chief as ‘Emjindini’, and to the Barberton township areas as ‘the townships’.

The social and economic background of Emjindini

One questionnaire was administered to each household. The researchers were asked to target approximately the same number of men as women in administering the questionnaire. While the majority of respondents were men, a good balance of men and women was achieved (55% men, 45% women).

	Frequency	Percent
male	186	55.5
female	149	44.5
Total	335	100.0

Table 1. Sample composition by Sex for Emjindini chiefship and Barberton townships (N=335)

Similarly, a representative sample of ages of respondents was also achieved, divided into age groups of ‘Under 20’, ‘20-30’, ‘30-40’, ‘40-50’, and ‘50-60’ and ‘60+’ years old. The sample appears to represent the normal distribution of ages of those in charge of households in South Africa in general.

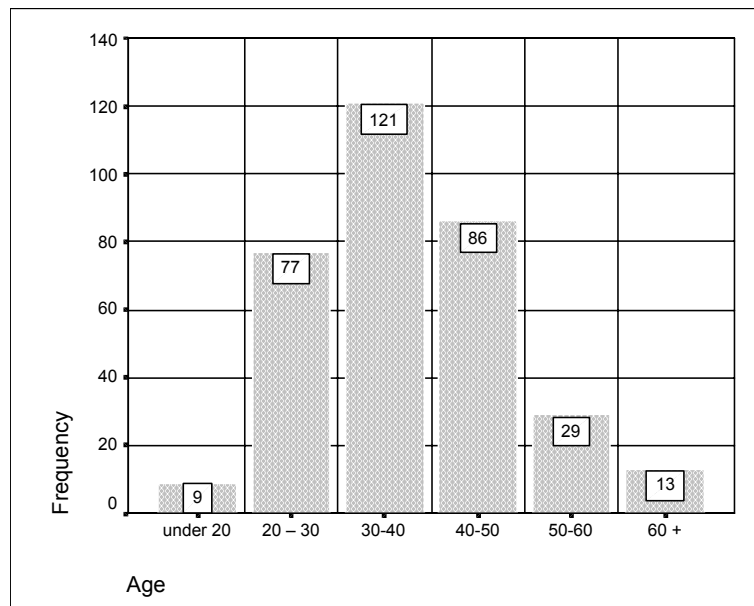


Figure 1. Sample composition by age group (N=335) for Emjindini and Barberton townships

Despite the generally representative age range of adults in the samples, it appears that marriage is not a priority among the residents of Emjindini. Only a third of all respondents claimed to be married by the magistrate, by customary rites or by religious ceremonies. While virtually all of the households surveyed had children in them, relatively few were actually born into families in which the mother and father were married to each other and

¹⁸ Zelda Gama, personal communication.

were the biological parents of the children. Although data were not collected on this, most households included numbers of people—children and adults—who were not members of a single ‘nuclear’ family. This appears to be normative for many South African black communities. However 75% of all households had at least one adult female or male member, while only 12.5% of all households did not have an adult male, and 5% of these did not have an adult female member.

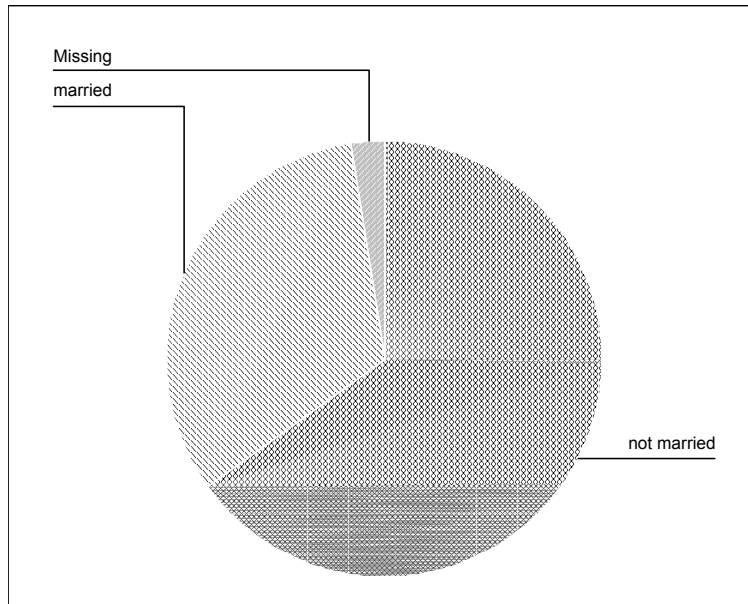


Figure 2. Marital status of respondents (N= 335)

The low rate of marriage is, however, surprising since a large percentage of them claimed religious affiliations of one Christian denomination or another. Churches are scattered throughout the area, and church membership and attendance is clearly high. Unfortunately, the questionnaire assumed that religious affiliation was predominately Christian. We did not ask how many, if any, were ‘pagan’ or considered themselves to be practitioners of some form of African traditional religion. My impression, however, is that there are very few, in any, who could claim this.¹⁹ The category ‘Other’, therefore, includes other Christian denominations.²⁰

¹⁹ During fieldwork in Barberton and Emjindini, I have not yet encountered anyone who asserts that they follow exclusively or optionally something that might be called ‘African traditional religion’. This does not mean, however, that many people would not consult ‘traditional healers’ (*sangomas*) or acknowledge or ‘pray’ (*phahla*) their ancestors (*amadlozi*) or even sacrifice for the *amadlozi* on occasion.

²⁰ There is a sizeable Muslim population, but this is restricted to the ‘Indian’ population of Barberton. Only 4 respondents declined to answer, or gave no data for this item on the questionnaire.

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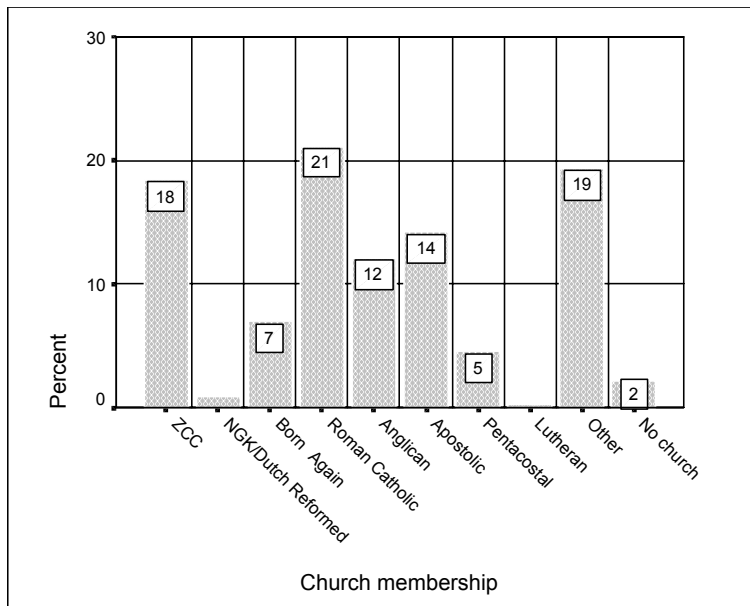


Figure 3. Church Affiliation for Barberton Townships and Emjindini, in percentages (N=335)

Marriage appeared to be highest amongst the ‘Born Again’ (50%) and Roman Catholics (35%), although all of the three members of the NGK are married. Nevertheless, people belonging to all religious denomination preferred to remain unmarried, with the rate of marriage overall around 33% for those adults surveyed. In general, religious affiliation appears to have little effect on the rate of marriage.

	ZCC	NGK/Dutch Reformed	Born Again	Roman Catholic	Anglican	Apostolic	Pentacostal	Lutheran	Other	No church	
Not married	43		11	43	27	33	10	1	41	5	214
Married	18	3	11	24	13	13	5		20	2	109
	61	3	22	67	40	46	15	1	61	7	323

Table 2. Effect of Church membership on marital status

In addition to the diversity of religious affiliations, there is also a diversity of first languages in the rural Emjindini area. Most people say that the area is ‘Swazi’ and assert its strong Swazi identity. Despite this, Tsonga speakers comprised a relatively high 7% with a handful of people who said their first language was not Swazi. Not speaking Swazi, however, did not imply that the respondent had been born elsewhere, since two Tsonga-speakers had been born in Emjindini. Virtually all of the non Swazi-speakers, however, were women, most of whom had either married Swazi men in Emjindini, or had moved in to the area.

	Frequency	Percent
Swazi	301	89.9
Sepedi	7	2.1
Tsonga	22	6.6
Zulu	3	.9
Venda	1	.3
Other	1	.3
Total	335	100.0

Table 3. First Language of Respondents. (N=335)

In general, levels of education were very low, with 43% of the sample having no education at all and nearly 63% of the population having only a Primary school education (up to standard 6) or less. Only 16% had completed high school with matric certificates or had

higher qualifications. Most of those with high school or higher educational qualifications lived in the township, however. Standards of education were lower in Emjindini, where 50% of the sample had no education, and 68% had only a primary school education or less.

Highest level of education achieved	Frequency	Percent
No education	146	43.6
Standard 6 or below	65	19.4
Standard 6-10	68	20.3
High School (Matric. Cert.)	50	14.9
Technikon	3	.9
University	1	.3
Total	333	99.4
Missing data	2	.6
Total	335	100.0

Table 4. Levels of education in Barberton and Emjindini (N=335)

Employment rates were also low. About 41% of all respondents (45% in Emjindini) declared themselves to be unemployed, while the remainder claimed to be either self-employed or to be working for an employer. Much of the employment in the area, however, is seasonal work on white-owned farms, or semi-permanent work on several large vegetable farms that supply Woolworths, Pick ‘n Pay and other large grocery chains in the urban areas. Many of those who were ‘unemployed’ at the time of the survey (October 2001) work as seasonal labour. A few work for government (roads, the municipality) and those who are self-employed run small businesses such as spaza shops or are tradesmen. Those who live in Emjindini raise small crops of vegetables and/or livestock.

	Frequency	Percent
Still at school	11	3.3
Working for an employer	138	41.2
Self-employed	49	14.6
Unemployed	137	40.9
Total	335	100.0

Table 5. Employment status (N=335)

Although approximately 56% of the respondents were employed in one way or another, income (declared for this questionnaire) was very low with 56% of respondents claiming an income of less than R500 per month. Only 4% claimed an income greater than R2000, but this is almost certainly an artefact of the questionnaire process.²¹ It is very likely that most people sampled actually had household incomes greater than the amounts indicated, but the relative proportion of people in these income categories (allowing for some upward adjustment) is probably more or less accurate. The low level of income is certainly borne out of the state of accommodation. In Emjindini, most people rely on off-cuts from Sappi timber plantations, with assorted other bits of plastic, bricks, tin and cardboard to construct their living quarters. Most homesteads have several such houses on them, with only a few goats and chickens. Some have small vegetable gardens, but since water must be carried from the rivers these are unproductive and, at best, only contribute to subsistence. In the Barberton townships, however, there is a wide range of types of accommodation from very substantial ‘suburban style’ homes with 3 or more bedrooms (some even multi-storey) to the humblest of

²¹ Chief Kenneth Dlamini and the Speaker of the tribal council, Lucky Nkosi, both believe that these figures are too low. They suggest that people are not likely to have reported their real incomes accurately. Indeed, these amounts do seem low, and may reflect only the respondent’s income without including other incomes in the household.

shacks made of wood, cardboard and plastic. The different types of accommodation are often built side by side, since there is no clear ‘class’ division within the townships apart from the older, and slightly more prestigious area of New Village.

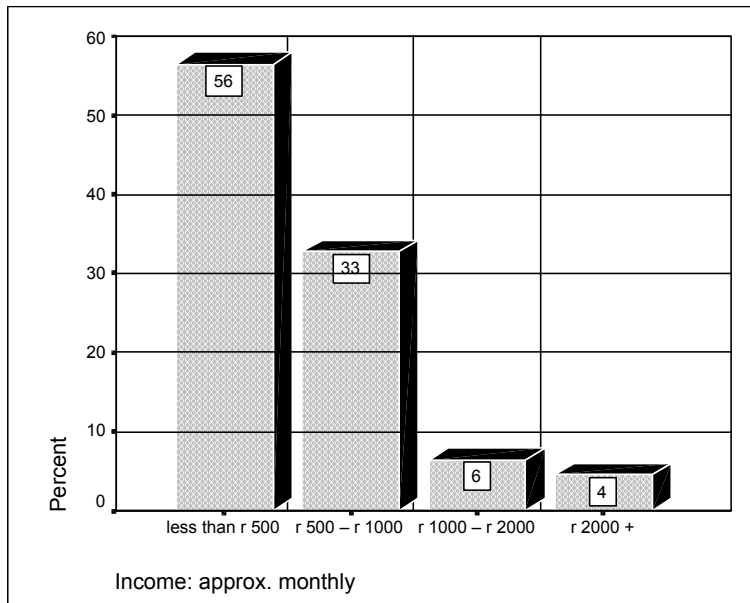


Figure 4. Approximate monthly income per household

Household size ranged from one person to 14, with the median number of people in each household was five. The household size measure gave a remarkably normal distribution around the mid-point of 5, with only 15 ‘outliers’ of more than 10 people in the household. This reflects the number of people living in one household unit, generally two to three adults with children. In the township, each ‘household’ is situated on its own clearly demarcated plot. There is usually one main house and sometimes other outbuildings and shacks also on the same property. This constitutes a single household in the township. In the Emjindini tribal area, however, there are no clearly demarcated plots. Houses are often grouped together in a homestead, but in this case each house constitutes a different household. Although it is not always clear to an outsider where the boundaries of a household lie, residents are have no such confusion. In the Emjindini area, the chief allocates household sites initially. Once he has granted rights to a site, however, household residents may bring in kin or continue to grow and occupy a larger area. According to custom, the chief cannot remove rights to land once they have been granted. The data shows a large range in household sizes, then, largely due to natural growth and to fostering of children of migrants and non-resident household members who may live and work in the cities.

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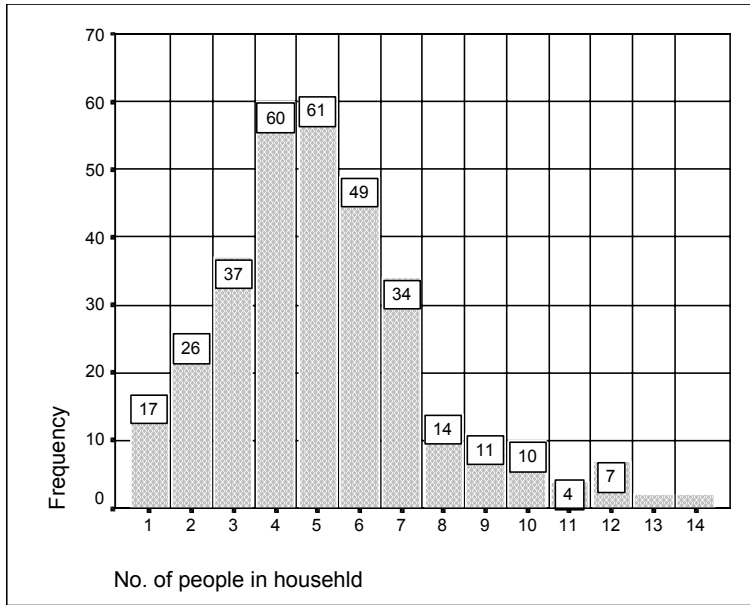


Figure 5. Number of people resident in each household (not homestead) [N=335]. Mean=5.25; Mode=5

Despite the relative lack of commitment to marriage, statistically speaking, household composition looked remarkably ‘middle class’, with on average 1 adult female, one adult male, and 3 children per house. Only 49 (15%) houses lacked adult male members, while 21 (6%) lacked adult female members. Number of children ranged from none (42 households, 12.5%) to twelve with a mean of 3.14 and median of 3 children per household. While many households had more than two adult members, with additional adult male and female members, the questionnaire methodology did not allow further analysis of household structure.

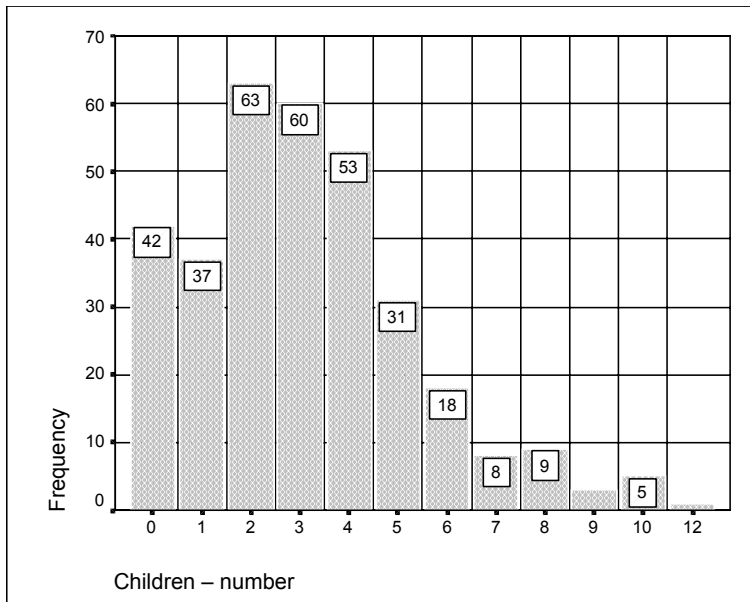


Figure 6. Number of children in households (N=335)

Economically, people have seen little improvement in their lives since the transition to democratic government under the new constitution of 1994. This year was used as a marker in order to ask questions about whether conditions in the chiefdom had improved or deteriorated in the subsequent seven years before the present questionnaire was administered

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(October 2001). Overwhelmingly, respondents felt that things had become worse in all areas on which they were asked, including access to schooling, water, electricity and jobs. In general, they felt that the ‘financial situation’ and the ‘general situation’ had become worse. This disillusionment did not vary significantly by sex, although slightly fewer women than men felt that the situation was ‘much worse’.

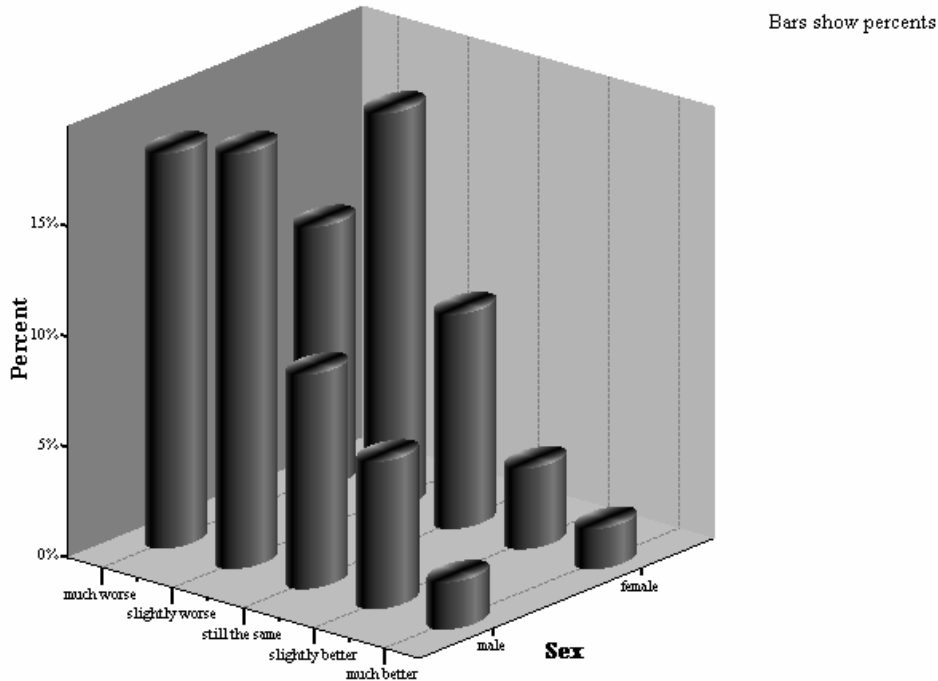


Figure 7. Assessment of the ‘general situation since 1994’, differentiated by sex (N=335)

Since the Emjindini tribal farms were obtained in 1998, there has been very little development of any kind. About half of the residents were already living on the farm, but many others came to settle once the Department of Land Affairs (DLA) had purchased the farm for the chiefship. It is not surprising, then, that most feel that the situation in general has become worse since 1994. Nevertheless, 84% declare allegiance to the ANC (the national ruling party and the party of all members of the local municipal council) although very few are actually members of the party. Most people expected a general improvement in their lives after the ANC took power, but this has not happened. Disillusionment with the pace of development, however, has not translated into rejection of the ruling party.

Party ²²	Frequency	Percent
None	14	4.2
ANC	281	83.9
IFP	5	1.5
DA	8	2.4
UDM	8	2.4
PAC	8	2.4
Other	1	.3
dk/na	10	3.0
	335	100.0

Table 5. Political party supported

While support for political parties is unresponsive to perceived economic decline, it also does not seem to be correlated with any other social differences. Although the IFP is generally known as a Zulu party, none of the 3 first-language Zulu speakers are members of it. In Emjindini, the members of IFP are Swazi (3 people) and SePedi speakers (2). With additional exception of one Tsonga speaker who belongs to the PAC, all non-Swazi speakers belong to the ANC, and the members of all other parties (including ‘other’ and ‘don’t know/ no answer’) are Swazi speakers. Thus there seems to be no political division based on ethnicity or identification with a particular language. Similarly, there seems to be no correlation between party affiliation and sex, church membership, or income. There is a weak correlation between age and party membership; all people under thirty are ANC members. Membership of all other parties is more or less evenly distributed across all other age groups. Some patterns also existed between party membership and educational level. All DA members had more than a standard 6 education, while 47% of ANC members had no education at all, and two-thirds had less than standard six education. The three persons with technicon or university education were all ANC members, however. It is impossible to draw any firm conclusions about this since there were relatively few members of other parties compared with the ANC. It is also not valid to conclude from the above discussion that ANC members tended to be both young and uneducated since most of those without education were older people.

Perceptions of Chiefship and Municipal government in Emjindini

Since the introduction of the Municipal Demarcation Act in 2000, chiefs throughout South Africa have been at loggerheads with government over the definition and exercise of their powers. In fact, under the constitution, chiefs only have ‘recognition’. The constitution does not specify discrete political or administrative powers for chiefs, but recognises them as community representatives and guardians of tradition and culture. With the introduction of the Municipalities Act, municipal boundaries were greatly expanded to include areas around towns—such as Emjindini outside of Barberton—as parts of the municipality. Municipalities were divided into wards, with counsellors elected for each ward. Counsellors sit on the municipal governing body with a mayor at its head. In Barberton/Emjindini, the previously ‘tribal trust’ land of Emjindini has been included in the new municipality of ‘Umjindi’ which now includes the old, formerly ‘white’ Barberton, the formerly ‘black’ townships, and the chiefship of Emjindini, among other areas. After considerable negotiation with the national Department of Local Government and Provincial Affairs under Minister Sydney Mufumadi,

²² ANC = African National Congress, the ruling party; IFP = Inkatha Freedom Party, a largely Zulu party, with a ruling majority in KwaZulu-Natal; DA = Democratic Alliance, official opposition in Parliament; UDM = United Democratic Movement, based primarily in Eastern Cape Province; PAC = Pan African Congress, a small party with significant following in the lowveld.

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chiefs have been granted a 20% representation on the Municipal Council. A meeting between municipal council and the chief’s council has been scheduled for early 2002 to work out the details of how they will cooperate in the governance of Umjindi.

In general, people in Umjindi show reasonably high levels of support for both the chiefship and the municipality. Surprisingly, support for the chiefship as an institution (*bukhosi*) was higher than support for the municipality. In particular, the support for the institution of chiefship was highest (85%)²³ in the townships, and lower (43%)²⁴ in the Emjindini area. Overall there is a tendency for people to support both institutions, although there are significant numbers who rate the municipality positively and the chiefship negatively (24 people; 16% of those having an opinion, including ‘neutral’ but excluding ‘don’t know/no answer’) and vice versa (8 respondents; or 5%). Forty-five respondents (30% of those who responded) however rate both institutions positively, while only six (4%) thought both institutions were ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’.

Assessment of Municipality	Assessment of chiefship					Total
	very bad	bad	neutral	good	very good	
very bad	1	1		1	1	4
bad		4	9	4	2	19
neutral	1	1	26	13	4	45
good	6	8	6	21	9	50
very good	5	5	5	5	10	30
dk/na	17	16	15	32	29	109
	30	35	61	76	55	257

Figure 8. Comparison between rating of municipality and chiefship (N=335)

The number of people who chose not to answer this question who expressed neutrality on both judgements (44% of the entire sample), however, is much more significant.²⁵ This seems to reflect a ‘wait and see’ pragmatic attitude rather than apathy or ignorance. The large number who refused to express opinions on this question also suggests that they are amenable to placing their support behind the institution that begins to provide them with benefits. At them moment, strongly negative attitudes about development in the area say that they are not overly impressed with any political institution whether this be the chiefship, the municipality, political parties or central government.

²³ 3% (2 persons) of the township sample declined to answer this questions (N=75).

²⁴ 3% (10 persons) of the Emjindini respondents declined to answer this question. (N=260)

²⁵ Unfortunately, the category ‘don’t know/ no answer’ (dk/na) is absent in the data rating the chiefship, but amounts to 78 respondents as reflected in this table.

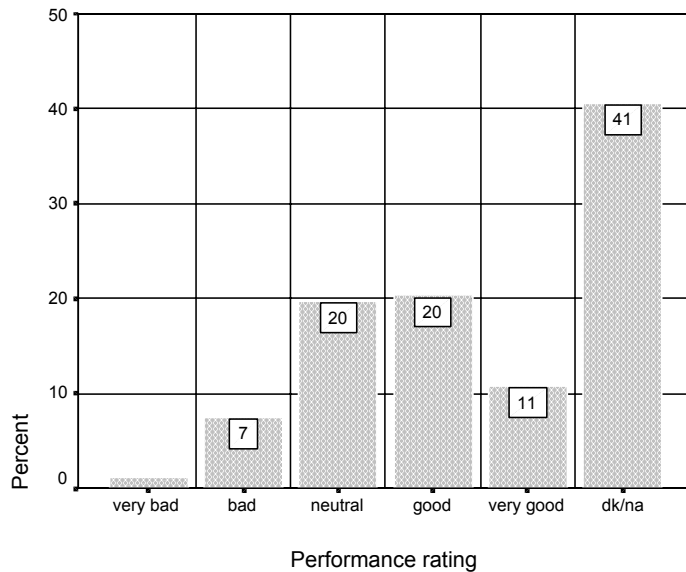


Figure 9. Performance rating for the municipality (N = 335)

Figure 9 shows that there is a generally low level of approval for the performance of the municipality (31% of those expressing an opinion, including ‘neutral’). This may simply indicate that there is very little familiarity as yet with the municipality structures. The majority of the entire sample (61%)²⁶ either said they did not have an opinion or declined to answer at all, while others expressed ambivalence or neutrality towards the municipality (20%). At first glance it would seem that this should not be difficult to understand, since the municipalities were only introduced to Emjindini in 2000 when the municipalities demarcation act was implemented. This brought Emjindini under the jurisdiction of the elected council of the municipality for the first time. The smaller sub-sample of households in the ‘Umjindi’ township itself, however, have been under municipal control since 1994, and before that still formed part of the Barberton urban area although divided by apartheid legislation into black and white areas. The township sample of 75 households shows that although they were generally loathe to express an opinion about either chiefship or municipality government, significantly more people in the township had more positive feelings about the chiefship (29.3%) than those who felt the same way about the municipality (18.7%). Also only 32% expressed a ‘neutral’ opinion about the chiefship compared with 72% who declined to assess the municipality as either good or bad.²⁷

No one in the township, unlike Emjindini tribal area, expressed an extremely negative opinion about either and some—though very few—found either the chiefship and/or the municipality ‘very good’. Thus, lack of familiarity with municipal government does not seem to explain the poor overall rating that was given to the municipality. Those with most familiarity with municipal government generally rate it most negatively or remain ‘neutral’. And, generally speaking, in South Africa a refusal to express an opinion implies a negative attitude. People either fear reprisal for expressing a negative attitude to those in power, or hold the view that ‘if you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all’. We can infer, then, that assessment of the *performance* of the institutions of chiefship and municipal

²⁶ This includes those who refused to answer the question

²⁷ The large number of ‘don’t know/ no answer’ responses on the question about support for the chiefship probably reflects the fact that many people in the townships do not have any direct contact with the chief or the institutions of chiefship, and thus are more inclined not to answer. However, if these are combined with the ‘neutral’ response, the difference between these scores for the chiefship and municipality virtually disappears.

government are generally negative, but that people maintain a pragmatic attitude towards both, waiting to see which one might eventually deliver on promises for development.

Rating	Chiefship		Municipality	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Very bad	0	0	0	0
bad	1	1.3	5	6.7
neutral	24	32.0	54	72.0
good	19	25.3	8	10.7
very good	3	4.0	6	8.0
Don't know/na	28	37.3	2	2.7
	75	100.0	75	100.0

Table 6. Comparison between ratings for chiefship and the municipality within the Township --excluding Emjindini tribal area. (N=75).

Against the generally negative attitude towards the municipality, there is a much higher rating of chiefship as an institution. Figure 10 shows this clearly. Nevertheless, there is a clear and strong difference of opinion, and large numbers of people who refuse to express an opinion.

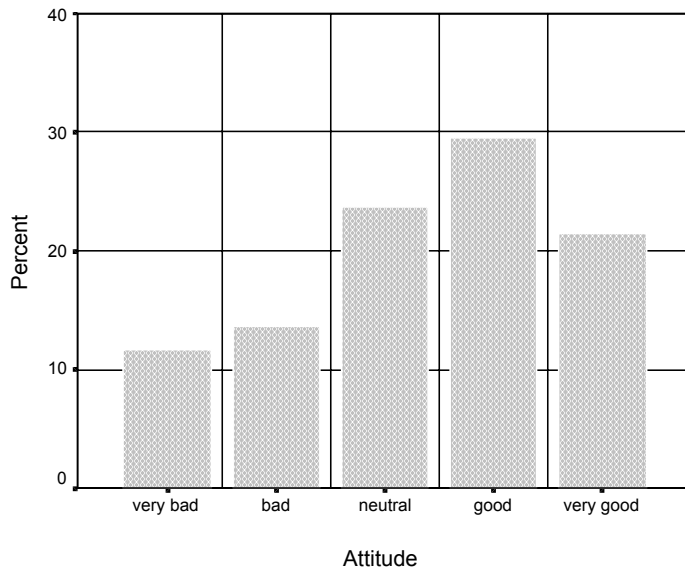


Figure 10. General assessment of the chiefship as an institution (N=335). No response/don't know: 78 (23%) cases

Compared with the general assessment of the municipality, there is a more even spread of opinion on the chiefship. Approximately 57% feel that the chiefship is either bad, very bad, or are neutral. On the other hand, 43% are generally in favour of the chiefship, against only 33% who are generally negative.

The generally positive attitude to the chiefship in general carries through into support for the chief himself, Kenneth Dlamini (Figure 11 and Table 7). Interestingly, only 3% of all respondents declined to answer this question, as opposed to the large majorities who refused to rate the institutions as such. This suggests that attitudes are formed much less in respect of abstract institutions than in respect of persons. People who are ‘agnostic’ about the institution nevertheless have strong feeling that they will express about the current chief himself.

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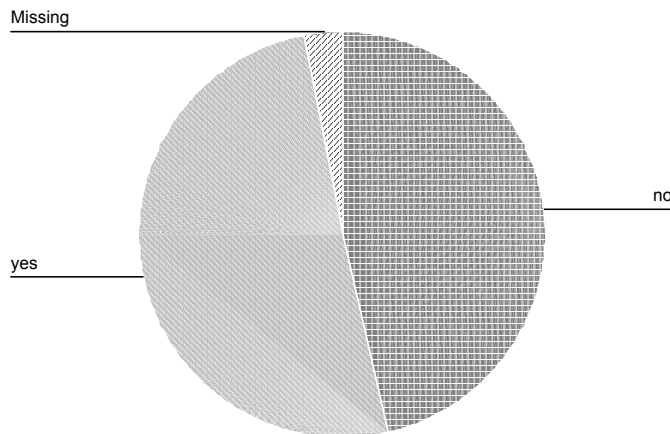


Figure 11. Support for the chief, Kenneth Dlamini

Do you support the chief?	Frequency	Percent
no	155	46.3
yes	170	50.7
Total	325	97.0
Don't know/ no answer	10	3.0
	335	100.0

Table 7. Support for Chief Kenneth Dlamini (N=335)

Chief Kenneth Dlamini manages to carry the support of just over 50% of his ‘constituency’.²⁸ That he does not have more support is probably due to the fact that the current chief is very young, new in the role, and had not made much effort to promote himself among the people of Emjindini. He also has a court case against him, still pending in court, over the (probably accidental) killing of a youth in a shooting incident last year. Several respondents explicitly mentioned this as the reason they did not support him. Others, the vast majority, claimed that ‘he does nothing for us’.

Support (or lack of support) for the chief is relatively evenly distributed across all age ranges. In other words, there is a diversity of opinion among all age groups, and no age group is strongly either in favour of the chief or rejects him entirely. There is, however, a tendency for more older people to support the chief.²⁹ While those under the age of 30 are more likely not to support the chief, those over 50 are much more likely to support him. This is not particularly surprising if we consider that older people are more in favour of ‘tradition’ than younger ones. What is surprising, however, is that the age group of 30-50 year olds show a weak tendency to *support* the chief. These are the people who might have been politically active in the 1980s when, according to the ANC and its affiliates, chiefs were strongly rejected as part of the Apartheid system. Indeed, as officers of the government under Apartheid, they were responsible for enforcing its laws. Intensive propaganda was directed

²⁸ I do not use the term ‘subjects’ since this is a misrepresentation of the relationship between chiefs and their followers in contemporary South Africa. As shown below, people believe the chiefship is essentially a ‘democratic’ institution (though they mean something different by the term ‘democracy’ than Western political theory does), and assert that ‘the chief is a chief by the people’.

²⁹ $\chi^2 = 14.73$, $p = 0.01$ (2-tailed); $\lambda = 0.135$ for dependent variable ‘support nkhosi?’

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against the chiefs from all parties to the left of the political spectrum, and many chiefs were attacked or killed during this period. In spite of this, those who would have been most influenced by the politics of the struggle against Apartheid now tend to support the chief.

Age	Support nkhosi?		Total
	No	Yes	
under 20	5	4	9
20 – 30	45	28	73
30-40	61	58	119
40-50	32	52	84
50-60	8	20	28
60 +	4	8	12
Total	155	170	325

Table 8. Support for Nkhosi depending on age group (N=335; 10 did not answer)

Similarly, there is a difference of opinion among people of both sexes. Men, however, tend with a high level of statistical significance to support the chiefship more than women do.³⁰

Sex	Support nkhosi?		Total
	No	Yes	
male	79	103	182
female	76	67	143
Total	155	170	325

Table 9. Support for Nkhosi depending on sex (N=335; 10 did not answer)

This finding is expected since the chief is male and the chiefship is generally held to be a male-centred, even male chauvinistic or ‘patriarchal’³¹ institution. Nevertheless, there are only slightly fewer women who do not support the chief than those who do. While this difference is statistically significant, the fact that female opinion is more or less evenly divided is probably of greater political importance. It suggests that males and females, as categories, are generally in agreement about their assessment of the chiefship. This is borne out forcefully by examining the distribution of answers to the question ‘Does the chief discriminate against women?’

Sex	Discriminates against women?		Total
	No	Yes	
Male	31 (65%)	17 (35%)	48 (100%)
Female	22 (65%)	12 (35%)	34 (100%)
Totals	53	29	82

Table 10. ‘Does the chief discriminate against women’ x sex

Despite the fact that only 25% of people questioned about this matter chose to express an opinion, it is remarkable that the proportions of males and females who agree or disagree with this question are identical. Just as we have seen concerning their assessment of the ‘general situation since 1994’ (Figure 7) and their support for the chief, men and women are more or less equally divided in their opinions. It is not clear, however, what interpretation we can draw from the fact that many chose not to express an opinion. There has been a vast amount

³⁰ $\chi^2 = 3.045$, $p = 0.081$; $\lambda = 0.058$ for dependent variable ‘support nkhosi?’ According to Fisher’s Exact test, $p = 0.094$ (2-tailed).

³¹ ‘Patriarchal’ is the word most often used in South African feminist and gender studies to mean any thing that is male-centred, or that privileges males in any way. In South African academic discourse, it apparently does not mean ‘rule by senior males’ or ‘authority of fathers’, according to its etymological and fundamental meaning, but is rather more general in its application.

of discussion of sexual discrimination and gender bias in all South African media, including Swazi language radio broadcasts that the people of Emjindini are likely to have heard. They are not ignorant of the issues. If there were truly a strong degree of feeling on the matter, I expect that this would be reflected in more people wishing to make their opinion known. The fact that many did not express an opinion suggests that they were more or less content with the situation, that is, that they believed there was no reason for concern about sexual discrimination. This does not mean that in some objective terms the chief, and the chiefship as an institution, does not discriminate against women. In all likelihood, it only means that the large majority—both men and women—agreed that what happened in practice was acceptable. But this needs to be tested by further ethnographic enquiry.

Language was not a particularly good predictor of support for the nkhosi, although support for the Nkhosi was generally more evenly spread across the (fewer) non-Swazi speakers with more negative opinion being expressed by the Swazi first-language speakers. The sample of non-Swazi first language speakers is too small to make a judgement, and the data is too heavily skewed towards Swazis to make statistical tests meaningful.³²

When I presented the data on the level of support for the chiefship to Chief Kenneth Dlamini (Table 7), however, he remarked that the number of ‘Shangaans’ (that is, Tsonga-speakers) in Emjindini probably negatively affected the level of support shown in these statistics. ‘Its those Shangaans’, he said. I quickly drew his attention to Table 11 that shows that many Tsonga-speakers (‘Shangaans’) do indeed support the chief, while many first-language Swazi speakers do not. He accepted the data, but remained sceptical, I believe, of the so-called ‘Shangaans’ loyalty.

Support Nkhosi?	First Language					Total	
	Swazi	SePedi	Tsonga	Zulu	Venda		Other
No	135	6	13			1	155
Yes	156	1	9	3	1		170
	291	7	22	3	1	1	325

Table 11. Support for Nkhosi depending on language?

The data given here, however, does not give a true reflection of socially relevant categories. The question asked only about ‘first-language’, not about ‘ethnic’ or ‘tribal’ or family identity. There are many people with non-Swazi surnames who may not be generally accepted as ‘true Swazis’, but who nevertheless speak Swazi as their first language. These would include the large number of people who came into the area during the gold-rush days in the late nineteenth century from as far away as Malawi. A C Myburgh, the government ethnologist, noted in 1949 that

In the urban location Shangaan, Nhlanganu [a sub-category of what is called ‘Shangaan’ today] and even Blantyre [Malawi] immigrants have permanently settled and become members of the tribe, recognising the chief and paying tax in his name but retaining their own language. This tribe is predominantly Swazi however and while accepting other races as neighbours or tribesmen prefers association and intermarriage with Swazi or Zulu.³³

³² Nevertheless, $\chi^2 = 10.143$ and $p = 0.071$. These statistics are not easily interpretable on these data, however. SePedi and Tsonga speakers tend not to support the chief, but Zulu and Venda speakers do support the chief, but numbers are too small to make much of this finding here.

³³ A C Myburgh *The Tribes of Barberton District*, op. cit., p.33.

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According to N J van Warmelo’s estimates of population in the Barberton District during the 1940s, approximately 12% were of non-Swazi origin, mostly from ‘Portuguese East Africa’ (that is, ‘Shangaans’) or from ‘Nyasaland, Rhodesia, etc.’ (that is, from outside of the Union of South Africa).³⁴ This pattern continues today with numbers of ‘Shangaans’ (Tsonga speakers) arriving as refugees or migrants from Mozambique or from other parts of South Africa. These people generally assimilate gradually to the Swazi majority, either retaining their language as a family language, or mixing it freely with Swazi and ‘township Zulu’, the widely spoken *lingua franca*. To be ‘Swazi’, however, one must have a Swazi surname and ‘isibongo’ (‘clan name’ or ‘praise name’). Those who have Shangaan surnames would therefore not count as ‘real Swazis’ to the chief or others, although they would still be considered members of the chiefs following. Since the questionnaire was anonymous, the numbers of such people can not be reckoned from this data. Only those who have arrived and who have been incorporated recently would still speak Tsonga as a first language. It may be this larger category of people who are not ‘pure Swazi’—those with non-Swazi surnames—to which the chief may have been referring. Whether or not these are *actually* less likely to support the Swazi chiefship could only be ascertained by further ethnographic enquiry.

There was also no significant correlation between support for the chief and employment status or level of income. It appears that people who are self employed are more likely to support the chief, however. Otherwise, support for the chief is remarkably evenly distributed across all those who are working for an employer or who are still at school or unemployed.³⁵

Support chief?	Employment status				Total
	At school	Working for an employer	Self-employed	Unemployed	
No	5	66	16	68	155
Yes	6	67	32	65	170
Total	11	133	48	133	325

Table 12. Support for chief by employment status (N=335, 10 cases ‘dk/na’)

Similarly, there is virtually no correlation between the level of declared income and level of support for the chief.³⁶ The distributions of opinion for or against the chief is, again, remarkably evenly distributed across income categories. There is, however, a slight tendency for those in the highest income bracket to be more favourably disposed towards the chief than those in the lowest. While this relationship is weak, it is suggestive.

³⁴ Van Warmelo’s figures show 3240 from ‘Portuguese East Africa’ and 2900 from ‘Nyasaland, Rhodesia, etc.’, or 6140 from outside the Union. From: ‘Introduction’ to A C Myburgh, *The Tribes of Barberton District*, op. cit., pg. 18-20.

³⁵ $\chi^2 = 4.817$, $p = 0.186$. $\lambda = .014$, with a level of significance of 0.803 for the dependent variable ‘support Nkhosi?’, that is, effectively not significant. Goodman and Kruskal’s tau is 0.015 ($p = 0.186$), suggesting no significant correlation between these variables.

³⁶ $\chi^2 = 5.006$, $p = 0.171$. $\lambda = .032$, $p = 0.515$. Goodman and Kruskal’s tau = 0.017, with a significance of 0.173. These statistics, in other words, show no significant level of relationship between these variables.

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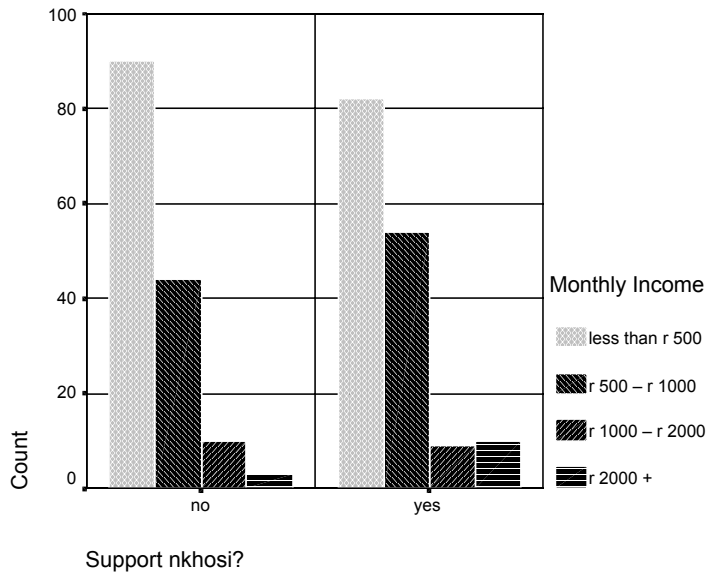


Figure 12. Support for chief and levels of income (N=335, 0)

The higher level of support given to the chief by those with higher incomes may reflect the difference between the lower level of support in the rural (and therefore poorer) Emjindini tribal area compared with the higher level of support the chief received in the townships where more people are employed.

A significant, though perplexing, difference in levels of support for the chief is found between the ‘urban’ township and the rural region of Emjindini. Surprisingly, support is much higher (85%) in the townships than it is in Emjindini.

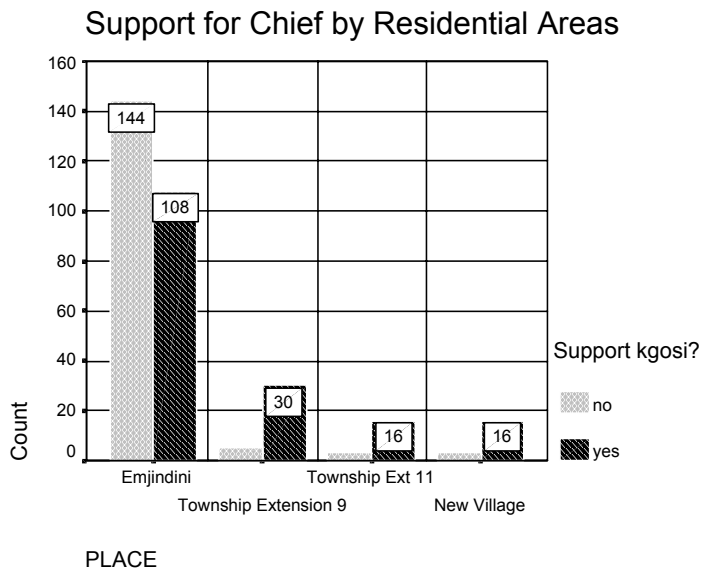


Figure 13. Support for Chief depending on residential area (N=335)

Thus, it is difficult to see what, if anything, might determine support for the chief. It would appear to be relatively ‘randomly’ distributed—in other words, there is no particular factor in this data that seems to account for it.

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This does not mean, of course, that support is ‘random’, or without cause, but only that the cause of opinions for or against the chief is determined by some unknown ‘political’ factor. In this it is like support for the ANC. Economic factors that might determine support for the ruling party in more ‘mature’ democracies (that is, those where ‘rational’ economic judgements are more easily applied by ‘maximising individuals’) does not determine support for political options in Emjindini. Support for the ANC, the Chiefship or Municipality seem to be determined by more personal factors such as ‘tradition’, or personal loyalty to office holders.

Levels of support to one side, people expect a great deal from both the municipality and the chief. Figure 14, Figure 15, and Figure 16 show what proportions of people believe that various political entities should provide various specific services and general political goods. When asked who should provide ‘democratic government’, ‘socio-economic development’ or who should promote community involvement in political and community activities, the largest number of people responded ‘political parties’! This is clearly the ‘wrong’ answer since political parties have no direct governmental function at all and do not provide services or ‘bribes’ of any kind.

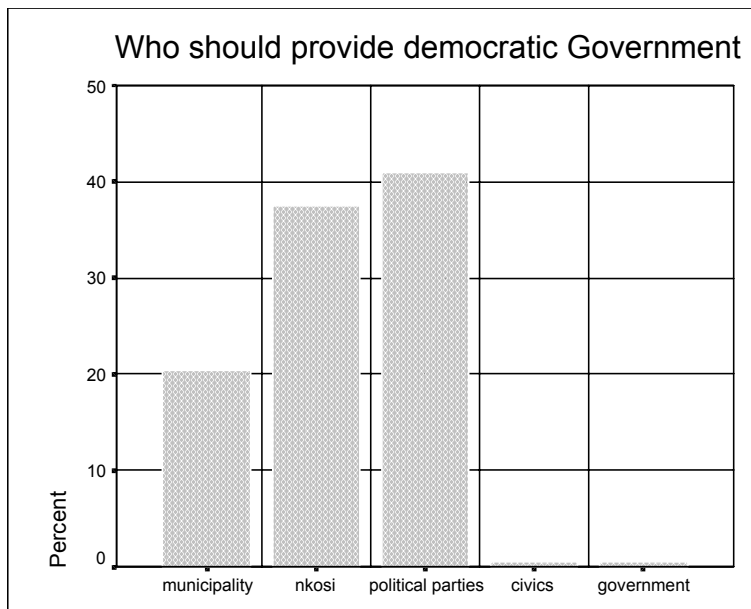


Figure 14 ‘Who should provide democratic government?’

Surprisingly, the chiefship is rated much higher in the expectation of which institution(s) should provide democratic government than the ‘democratically elected’ municipality. Only 2 respondents selected the ‘correct answer’—government, meaning here central authority—as the one that should provide ‘democratic government’! Clearly, people expect very little, if anything from central government, which is seen as being remote and generally irrelevant to local political affairs. This is despite the fact that central government is the only institution in charge of providing roads, schools, water, electricity and telephone services.

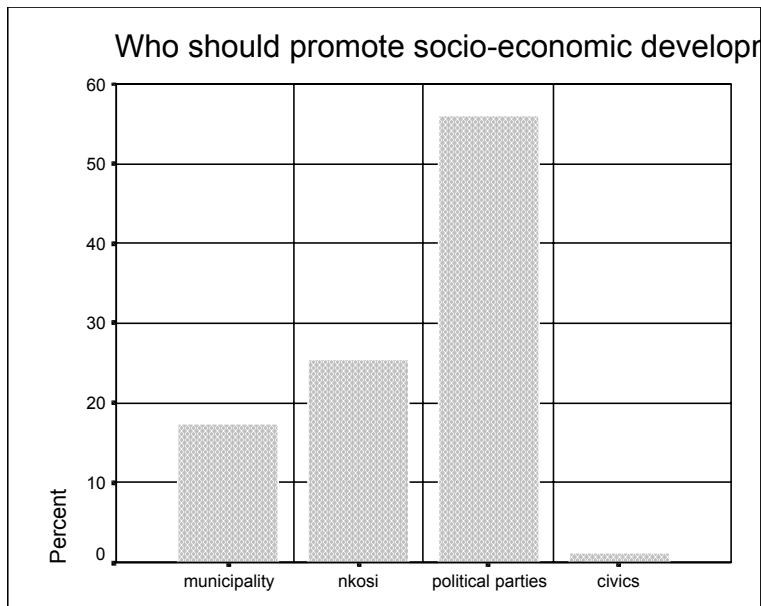
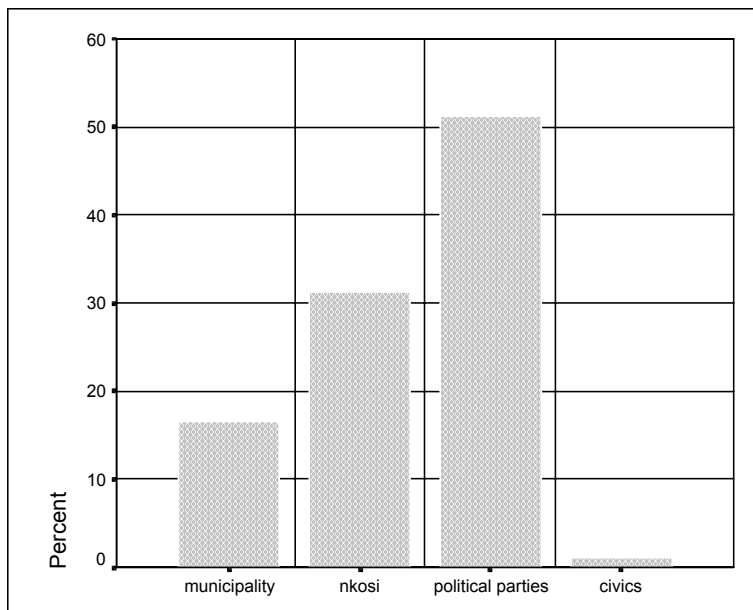


Figure 15. Who should provide socio-economic development?

Highest expectations for socio-economic development and for promotion of community affairs were expressed for ‘political parties’, meaning here the ANC in particular. Over 50% of respondents thought that political parties should provide these more abstract political goods.



Who should encourage involvement of communities in political and communal activities?

While the majority selected political parties as the governmental institution that should promote community involvement, the chief (*nkhosi*) was selected more often than the municipal government. It appears—counter intuitively—that the chiefship is viewed as more ‘democratic’ and more likely to be involved in community affairs than the municipality. Clearly, then, the people do see the chiefship as ‘anti-democratic’, or ‘authoritarian’ as many political analysts have claimed. Although the chiefship was certainly a central institution in the imposition of Apartheid rule, the negative attitudes towards the chiefship that were expressed during the ‘struggle’ seem to have evaporated in the new millennium.

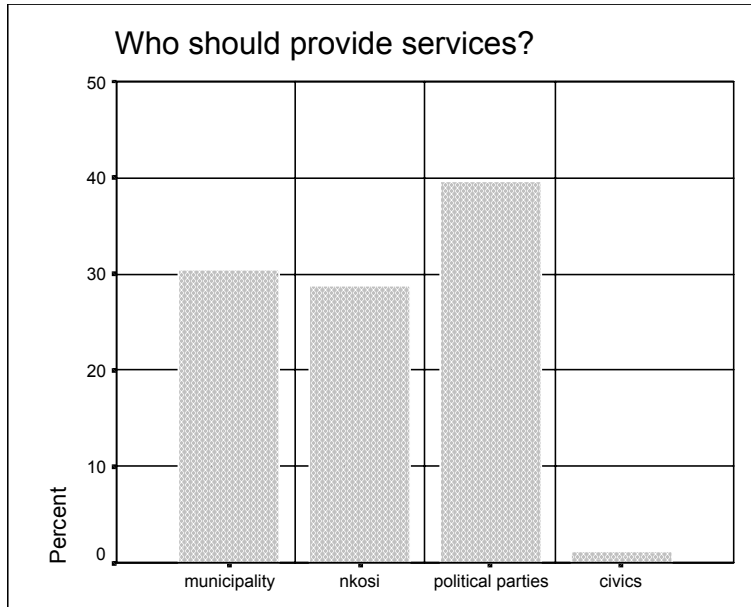


Figure 16. Who should provide services?

Opinion was more evenly divided between the chiefship, the municipality and political parties over who should provide services. In point of fact, again, the municipality is charged with delivery of water and electricity through para-statal organisations of Eskom (the national electricity supplier) and the Provincial Water Boards, in charge of bulk water supply. This fact seems to have been lost on the residents of Umjindi.

A complete summary of responses to the question of who should supply various goods and services, including political ‘goods’ such as democracy and community action, is shown in Table 13, below.

Who should ...	Municipality	Chief	Political Parties	Civics	Government	Other	Dk/na
Provide democratic government?	102 (30.4%)	107 (31.9%)	121 (36.1%)	3 (.9%)	1 (.3%)	0	1 (.3%)
Encourage involvement of communities?	93 (27.8%)	97 (29.0%)	139 (41.5%)	4 (1.2%)	0	0	2 (.6%)
Provide services?	134 (40%)	85 (25.4%)	110 (32.8%)	3 (.9%)	0	0	3 (.9%)
Promote safe environment?	108 (32.2%)	81 (24.2%)	137 (40.9%)	4 (1.2%)	0	0	5 (1.5%)
Promote socio-economic development?	103 (30.7%)	76 (22.7%)	149 (44.5%)	3 (.9%)	0	0	4 (1.2%)
Provide tourism?	129 (38.5%)	74 (22.1%)	117 (34.9%)	7 (2.1%)	0	0	8 (2.4%)
Provide water?	159 (47.5%)	68 (20.3%)	104 (31%)	1 (.3%)	0	0	3 (1.2%)
Make trading regulations?	132 (39.4%)	66 (19.7%)	125 (37.3%)	4 (1.2%)	0	0	8 (2.4%)
Provide electricity?	147 (43.9%)	63 (18.8%)	117 (34.9%)	1 (.3%)	0	0	7 (2.1%)
Provide roads?	155 (46.5%)	63 (18.8%)	111 (33.1%)	1 (.3%)	0	0	5 (1.5%)
Make building regulations?	139 (41.5%)	63 (18.8%)	127 (37.9%)	1 (.3%)		1 (.3%)	4 (1.2%)
Provide	122	62	137	6	0	0	8

‘Traditional Authority’ and governance in the Emjindini Royal Swazi Chiefdom

preschools?	(36.9%)	(18.5%)	(40.9%)	(1.8%)			(2.4%)
Provide clinics?	142 (42.4%)	62 (18.5%)	125 (37.3%)	1 (.3%)	0	0	7 (2.1%)

Table 13. Expectations for service provision by different levels or types of government

Only the field of ‘services’ does the municipality compare with expectations of the chief. Thirty-eight percent believe that the chief should provide democratic government, while 25% believe the chief should provide socio-economic development and 31% believe the chief should lead people in involving themselves in political and community action. Overwhelmingly, however, people believed that political parties ought to be delivering these services or leadership. Ironically, the political parties (meaning, for the most part, the ANC in this community) cannot do any more than provide political leadership and are entirely unable constitutionally or practically to provide the sort of expectations that these data suggest people have for them. In fact, government (*hulumende*) or the municipality (*masiphala*) is formally responsible for most of these areas, and yet receives a very low expectation for delivery according to these results.

Conclusion

This study suggests that while there is generally a surprisingly high level of support for the institution of chiefship in general, there is also an extremely high degree of apparent political naiveté about who and how services and political leadership can and should be achieved.

The data shows that support for the chief is relatively insensitive to economic factors, or differences of age, sex, religion, employment status and level of education. There are slight tendencies, however, for those who have higher incomes or better education, and for those who live in the township rather than the rural tribal area directly under the authority of the chief to support the chief. This finding contradicts widespread notions, especially prevalent in the South African government, that the chiefship is a dying political institution that can only be, at best, a cultural icon of African identity or a guardian of supposed ‘traditional values’ in the rural periphery. Clearly, whatever the chiefship represents, it is not dying, and it does not draw its strongest support from the rural periphery—although surprisingly strong support for it is also found there.

Interestingly, those in the age group who were most affected by the struggle rhetoric against the chiefs as agents of apartheid are now—almost a decade later—more likely to support the chief than those who are young enough not to have had any direct personal experience with the struggle against Apartheid. Again, this contradicts some of the most strongly held beliefs of the modernising ANC national political elite who suppose that support for chiefship would be weakest among those who were most likely to have participated in the struggle against Apartheid. In Barberton as elsewhere in the lowveld, this struggle included, above all, a struggle against the chiefs. Moreover, the data for all communities studied in the broader project suggests that support for the institution is increasing at all levels and age groups and in all social and economic categories. This may be related to the fact that the majority of people see little improvement in their lives since 1994, or indeed, feel that their general social and economic situation is actually worse than it was before the new ANC government took power. Strongly positive sentiment about a return to ‘tradition’ seems to include a more positive evaluation of the chiefship as an institution. Overwhelmingly, those who indicated their reasons for supporting the chief indicated that they did so because ‘it is our tradition’, or ‘it is the African custom’. Support for the institution of the chiefship thus seems to represent a strong and possibly growing belief that people must return to ‘tradition’ and to African

identities. In the South African context this means a closer identification with a ‘tribal’ or ethnic identity.

Such identities cannot be construed, however, as exclusive or even as strictly ‘ethnic’ or ‘tribal’ as these labels are understood elsewhere in the world. The Swazi people of Umjindi, like virtually all South Africans, are highly ‘mixed’, having absorbed large numbers of people from other language groups who still assert a different or ‘multi-cultural’ identity notwithstanding their simultaneous identification with the Swazi chiefship. People with Tsonga (Shangaan), Pedi, Zulu, or other non-Swazi backgrounds are aware of this difference, as are their ‘pure Swazi’ (those with Swazi surnames) neighbours. This does not mean that they are any less ‘subjects’ of the chief or that they are not Swazi with respect to their cultural identity in this context. Cultural identities here, as elsewhere in South Africa, are overlapping and multiplex. These identities may be significant in the context of business association, political affiliation, marriage patterns, or in membership of religious congregations—although this study is not able to make any judgements about this—but they apparently do not affect attitudes towards the chiefship. Rather, a generally positive attitude towards African tradition leads to support for the chiefship as an African cultural institution irrespective of other economic or social identities. The chiefship is a local institution, integrated with land and landscape, and therefore a counter-weight to the pressure of national government.

In fact, however, it appears that ‘government’—that is, the national ANC dominated government located in Pretoria and Cape Town—is essentially irrelevant. When asked ‘who should provide democratic government?’ virtually no one thought ‘government’ should do this job. The same was true for most other services and benefits that government should provide. Instead, people thought the municipality, the chief, or political parties should provide these services. Perhaps they feel that ‘government’ is simply not up to the job. Certainly Emjindini has seen no benefits from central government. However, most respondents in the Umjindi townships live in government-provided housing and have the benefits of electricity, piped water, schooling, roads and other services. Nevertheless, they are strongest in their support for the chief, and weakest in their support for the municipality. Those who chose to express an opinion at all, also rated the chiefship higher than the municipality, despite the fact that only the municipality is empowered to deliver the benefits that they receive. How can we interpret this apparent anomaly?

To answer this question, we must return again to the contested and ambiguous nature of the political community itself. South Africa’s diversity of languages, cultures, peoples and identities seems to entail strong local identities that, though always overlapping and ambiguous, are still ‘closer to home’ than the distant Pretoria government. Under all political dispensations, from colonial rule, through Union, the Republic, Apartheid and now the New South Africa under an ANC government, South Africans have long resisted central government. This was deployed as a central strategy in the struggle against Apartheid, but the end of Apartheid did not mean an end to resistance to the State. The *cultural permeability* of the South African border means that people not only identify as South Africans, but also, in this case, as Swazis whose political community spans national borders. The demographic permeability of these borders also means that political actors can participate in two national cultures. This implies, as King Mswati’s advisor remarked, that ‘culture is our politics’. ‘Culture’ here means the identification with African institutions such as the chiefship which is located in Emjindini, but which is defined not with respect to national boundaries but rather by allegiance to a Swazi tradition embodied by the chief himself and integrated with the Kingship of Swaziland. If the ANC has its own ‘chiefs’, so do the Swazi. Here African political identity is localised and personalised. It is also understood to rest on African

‘culture’ which is implicit and integral to everyday life. This does not mean, however, that people are not also willing to participate in a national politics through political parties. It does mean that they reject this as their only option. The chiefship with its hereditary (rather than elected) head, and its male-dominated and ‘tribal’ character, contradicts fundamental principles of the South African constitution. This brings it into fundamental conflict with the elected, democratic government. In formal political terms, they are like oil and water. From the point of view of the individual actor, however, both have the potential to be exploited for different purposes. Thus, there is no contradiction for the residents of Emjindini: their loyalties are not divided so much as strategically deployed. Their political identities are not fixed and exclusive but fungible and inclusive. The nature and limits of political community and of its appropriate political institutions are also part of the political contest. And since these are partly determined by ‘culture’, then culture is also politics.

Finally, can we take seriously the belief expressed by 32% of the respondents that the chief should provide democratic government? This raises a fundamental question about what people in Emjindini understand by ‘democracy’ and ‘government’ that empirical questionnaire research cannot answer. I would suggest that the respondents to this questionnaire took this to mean ‘government by the people’. The distance of government from ‘the people’, and the failure of government to deliver expected benefits seems to imply that only the local community can provide its own government and that the chief must play a role in this. As people in Emjindini have remarked to me, ‘when we elect these ANC people, they get in their new cars and drive to Nelspruit (the Provincial capital) and Pretoria and we never see them again.’ Or, as chiefs in the lowveld are fond of saying, ‘the chief is always here’.

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