
The Spectator Cannot Enter the Game: SAFA's Engineered Elections in Nelson Mandela Bay FA

By Dennis A. Mumble / 5 June 2026

There is a difference between an election that is transparent and an election that is democratic.

A ballot can be cast in full view of the room, counted aloud, and announced without secrecy. The process can appear orderly, procedural; even impressive. Yet if the people entitled to vote have already been selected through manipulated nominations, disqualifications, imposed committees, and centrally managed interventions, the transparency is only theatrical. The result has been arranged before the first ballot is folded.

That is the phenomenon increasingly visible across SAFA's regional elections: not crude ballot-stuffing, but the prior construction of the electorate itself — a choreography of eligibility, nominations, observers, and interventions that produces a predetermined congress while preserving the outward ritual of democratic choice.

One might call it curated democracy: the votes are counted openly, but the voting body has been curated in advance. The national elective congress then arrives not as a contest of ideas and support, but as the ceremonial ratification of decisions effectively settled months earlier in the regions. The ballot becomes the final scene of a play whose script was written elsewhere.

Nelson Mandela Bay: a case study in constitutional inversion

The events surrounding the SAFA Nelson Mandela Bay Regional Football Association elective congress of 31 May 2026 deserve careful attention for two reasons: (i) it is the SAFA President's home Region whose nomination he needs but received strong signals from the Regional President he would not get the backing of the Region, and (ii) because they illuminate a broader pattern.

The play opened with a bang when the Regional President was dramatically "suspended" -- without a hearing, in early September 2025. He has been awaiting a disciplinary hearing ever since. The Regional Congress was never informed of the suspension.

The "suspension" took a more dramatic turn when the Chairman of the SAFA Legal Committee advised that the suspension should be recognised, adding that it be extended to include suspension from all activities in SAFA.

The President of SAFA is alleged to have physically prevented the SAFA Nelson Mandela Bay President, who is also an NEC Member, from attending an NEC meeting in Bloemfontein on 9 September 2025. One obstacle down!

The curtain was raised on Scene Two on 10 May 2026 when the region held an Extraordinary Congress at which members

sought to address five elementary governance questions:

1. the establishment of an independent and transparent nominations process;
2. the appointment of an independent Electoral Committee;
3. the presentation of audited financial statements;
4. the lawful handling of suspensions and expulsions; and
5. related disciplinary matters.

These were not revolutionary items. They were the ordinary safeguards of a credible election. The Congress decided to reconvene on 14 June 2026 to cure the procedural defects that were identified even before the 10 May Congress. Yet the subsequent process moved in the opposite direction.

The Regional Executive proceeded with the election on 31 May despite the unresolved concerns, despite the deferred Extraordinary

Congress, and despite disputes regarding the appointment of the Electoral Committee and the auditor.

What the members asked for

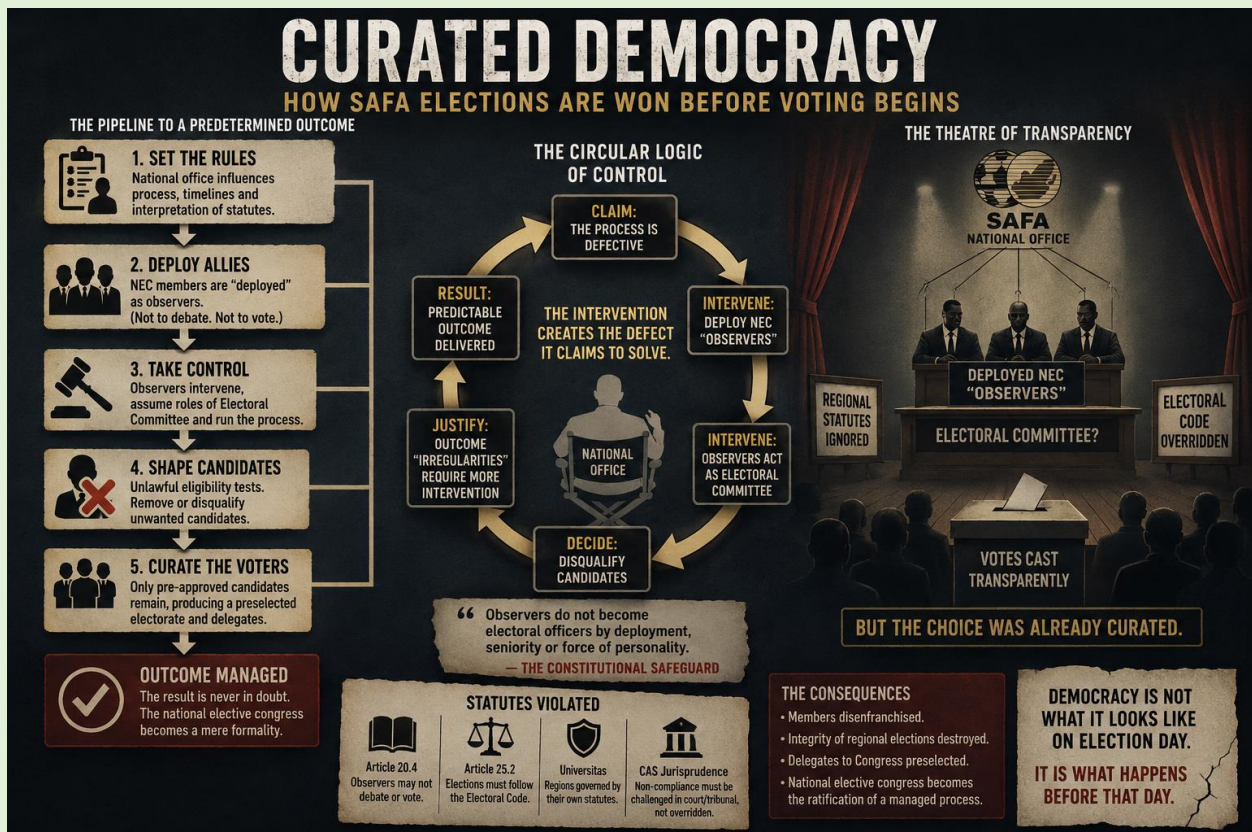
Congress — 10 May 2026

1. Independent nominations process.
2. Independent Electoral Committee.
3. Audited financial statements to members.
4. Lawful handling of suspensions/expulsions.
5. Related disciplinary matters dealt with constitutionally.

What happened next

Election — 31 May 2026

1. Election proceeded despite unresolved objections.



2. Disputed Electoral Committee and auditor process.
3. Congress decision of 10 May effectively bypassed.
4. NEC “observers” allegedly assumed operational electoral roles.
5. Candidate eligibility decisions were made during the congress itself.

The constitutional point that cannot be wished away

The central issue is not whether SAFA National may take an interest in regional affairs. Of course it may. The issue is how that interest is exercised.

SAFA regions are not administrative branches of a corporation. They are *universitates* — legal associations governed by their own constitutions.

Article 1.9 of the Nelson Mandela Bay statutes recognises that status. Article 25.2 still requires regional elections to be conducted in accordance with the SAFA Electoral Code. And Article 20.4 provides that Congress may appoint observers without the right to debate or vote.



That matters because the complaint lodged by Port Elizabeth East Football Association alleges that three NEC members introduced as observers — Messrs Tankiso Modipa, Andile Ngconjana and Mzimkhulu Fina — moved beyond observation and effectively

conducted the election, performing functions ordinarily reserved for a duly constituted Electoral Committee.

“This is his region and he won’t be silenced or be a silent observer”, Mzimkhulu Fina is alleged to have stated in the Congress, according to a delegate who attended the Congress.

If that allegation is correct, the problem is not merely procedural. It is constitutional. Observers do not become electoral officers by force of personality, seniority, or national office.

The clash in one line

Article 20.4 of the Regional statute states that Congress may appoint observers. The Observer’s role is to observe — no debate, no vote. The alleged conduct: Intervened, debated, and ran election functions. The Constitutional question then becomes: Can an observer become the Electoral Committee by deployment?

The deeper absurdity: when the cure becomes the breach. The intervention loop

The logic emerging from these interventions has the same self-defeating quality that has become familiar in other SAFA governance disputes.

Claim: “The regional process is defective”.

Deploy national NEC members as “observers”.

Observers act as an Electoral Committee and decide eligibility.

Candidates are removed; objections are overruled.

The intervention itself creates the constitutional defect it claimed to solve.

The claimed defect becomes the justification; the justification becomes the intervention; the intervention becomes the defect.

That is the inversion at the heart of the Nelson Mandela Bay dispute.

A process said to require supervision ends up being superseded by the supervisors. The observer becomes participant, the participant becomes adjudicator, and the adjudicator determines who may stand against the incumbent-aligned slate.

The constitutional safeguard is transformed into a mechanism of control.

Why the Electoral Code matters

Some may argue that the national statutes changed in 2022 and that references to the Electoral Code disappeared. But that is not the end of the enquiry.

The Electoral Code was adopted by Congress in 2013 pursuant to FIFA requirements and amended in 2018. Article 78 of the national statutes requires a two-thirds Congress resolution to rescind a Congress resolution. No such rescission was ever performed in a duly constituted SAFA Congress.

More importantly, the Nelson Mandela Bay statutes still expressly incorporate the Electoral Code. Even if the SAFA Electoral Code was no longer used for SAFA's national elections, the Regional Statutes still require elections to be conducted according to the SAFA Electoral Code in its last approved form.

A region cannot be instructed out of its own constitution by an informal deployment.

If SAFA National believes a regional statute is inconsistent with national policy, the lawful route is amendment, arbitration, or adjudication — not operational substitution on election day.

The troubling allegations

The PEEFA complaint raises several allegations that paints a disturbing picture:

1. Nomination procedures allegedly did not comply with Articles 25.6 and 25.7 of the regional statutes.
2. The auditor was allegedly appointed after nominations closed, and later recused himself.
3. Members were allegedly not given a functioning Electoral Appeals mechanism.
4. NEC observers allegedly assumed Electoral Committee functions despite Article 20.4.
5. Two candidates — including a presidential candidate — were allegedly removed from the final list by reference to national provisions that do not govern the regional election.
6. The congress allegedly proceeded without the auditor present to verify the nomination process.

Why these allegations matter

These points prove wrongdoing on its own. Together they describe a process in which the gatekeeping stages of an election — nominations, eligibility, appeals, and oversight — are stage-managed. That is precisely the terrain on which outcomes can be shaped long before voting starts.

A warning for the road to Congress

This article is not about one region alone. It is about a method.

When regional structures are pressured, when independent electoral bodies are bypassed, when eligibility is decided by those aligned with the centre, and when observers become operators, the cumulative effect is profound. Each regional congress produces delegates. Those delegates produce the national congress. If the regional pipeline is managed, the national outcome is largely secured in advance.

The final vote may be transparent. The democratic choice may already have been narrowed beyond recognition.

That is why the phrase “free and fair elections” cannot be reduced to what happens in the counting room. Freedom begins with nominations. Fairness begins with independent oversight. Democracy begins with the right of members to choose their representatives under the rules they themselves adopted.

A congress can look immaculate on the day and still be constitutionally compromised by the road that led to it.

If the allegations from Nelson Mandela Bay are left unresolved, the danger is not merely that one regional election becomes disputed. The danger is that a national elective congress arrives with all the outward dignity of constitutional process while resting on a foundation of curated electorates, managed candidacies, and centrally shaped delegations. The ballot papers will be visible. The result may be predictable. And the country will be invited to mistake the transparency of the final act for the democracy that should have existed from the beginning.

That is not electoral integrity. It is the manufacture of consent under the cover of procedure.

