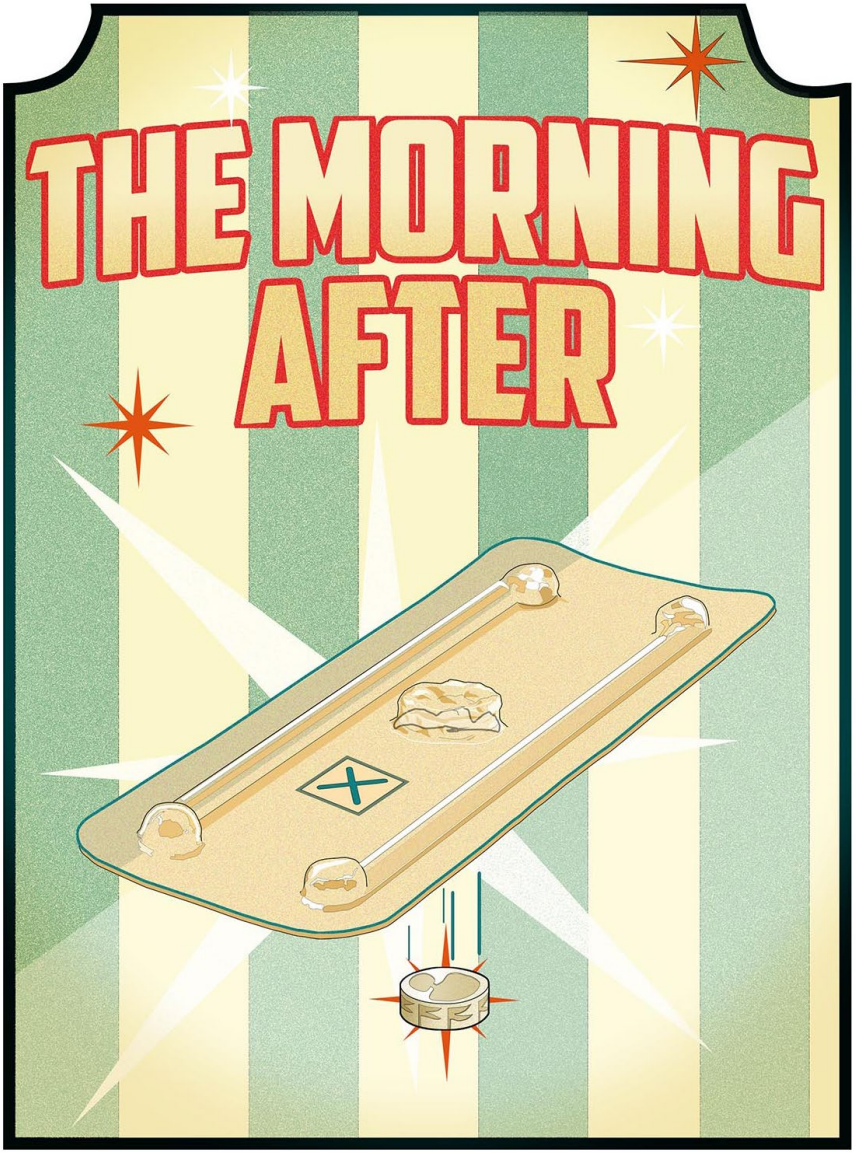
with The Continent

The Friday Paper

SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNALISM | 6 NOVEMBER 2026 | ISSUE 5



Graphic: Kagiso Diale

The intro

Listen to us

The results from Bophelo Impilo Private School in Mayfair, in Johannesburg's Ward 58, were among the first to be confirmed on Thursday morning. The ANC was the outright winner.

I voted there. It is a short walk from my home: across the Bird Street pavement that was a rubbish dump until a neighbour cleared it and planted a garden, then onto 12th Avenue, where there is no pavement at all and the grass is as tall as I am – though I am not especially tall.

The vote took me less than five minutes. There was just one other person voting when I was there. In Emmarentia, a few kilometres away, my relatives queued for two and a half hours.

On the way home, stepping around the grassy embankment, I kept thinking about what it means to be listened to: for voters to feel that someone will represent them.

In Mayfair, we feel our ANC councillor does that, and the results bear it out. It is the same in Laudium, in Tshwane, another ward I know well.

In both, the councillor lives among the people they serve, answers their calls and responds.

In an election in which the ANC lost ground almost everywhere, that is worth noticing. Both are places with large Muslim communities, and Muslim voters in Gauteng appear to have largely stayed with the ANC, in the face of Islamophobia, and with the war in Gaza and South Africa's case at the International Court of Justice on many minds. We will look at that more closely in the coming weeks.

The long queues elsewhere tell their own story. The high-income suburbs that turned out in numbers seem to be demanding an ear too. So do the townships that turned to ActionSA. Different voters, the same demand: listen to us.

That is now the test for whoever governs, and in most councils that will be a coalition.

Elsewhere in this edition: six Joburgers explain why they didn't vote; what the new councils inherit when it comes to water; what the stalled Coalition Bill would have changed; Lester Kiewit on the regrets of the morning after; and two giveaways, including tickets to a screening of *NAZA*.

Khotsong,
Khadija

Quote Unquote



Outside the boxes: President Cyril Ramaphosa voted in Johannesburg. Photo: Phill Magakoe/AFP

What the presidents said as they voted

"This is democracy at work." — **Cyril Ramaphosa, president, after voting at Hyde Park High School, Johannesburg**

"Things have gone wrong. The population is also saying that… the story of what went wrong is a long one to tell." — **Thabo Mbeki, former president, after voting at Killarney Country Club, Johannesburg**

"We ought to create the most efficient state at local government level." — **Kgalema Motlanthe, former president, after voting at Killarney Country Club, Johannesburg**

"We have done what we were supposed to do, now we wait for the results." —**Jacob Zuma, former president and MK party leader, after voting at Ntolwane Primary School, Nkandla**

Welcome to coalition country

You voted. In most places, nobody won outright. Most councils will now be run by parties that have to share power, and work out how to get along. So who came out on top, who lost, and what happens to your council now? Here's what we're learning. Reporting by Athandiwe Saba, Fatima Moosa and Khadija Patel.

All figures are provisional: IEC results at 8.01am on Friday 6 November, with 71% of voting districts counted. Metro tallies as compiled by *The South Africa Brief*.

What happened?

The ANC had its worst election yet. Five years ago, almost half of voters backed it. This time, fewer than one in three did, a lower share than even in 2024, when it lost its majority in Parliament. The DA came second, with a quarter of the vote, and the MK Party third. The bigger story is that, in most places, nobody won. Seven in ten councils with final results are hung, so parties must now work out how to govern together.

Who is leading in the metros?

Johannesburg: DA 40%, with the ANC and ActionSA level on 17% (46% counted). **Tshwane**: DA 32%, ActionSA 24%, and the ANC third on 22% (62% counted). **Ekurhuleni**: DA 30%, ANC 22%, ActionSA 20% (60% counted). **Cape Town**: DA 62% (50% counted). **Nelson Mandela Bay**: DA 45%, ANC 26% (79% counted). **Mangaung**: DA 37%, ANC 31% (68% counted). **Buffalo City**: ANC 42%, down from 62% in 2021, with the UDM on 20% and the DA 17% (97% counted). **eThekwini**: MK Party 44%, DA 21%, and the ANC third on 17% (37% counted).

What is a hung council, and what happens next?

A council is hung when no party wins more than half its seats. Then parties must team up to elect a mayor, speaker and executive, by a vote of the full council. The law gives them until the council's first sitting, which must happen within 14 days of the results being declared. A Coalition Bill that would have made coalition agreements public and legally binding, and given parties 30 days, is still stuck in Parliament (see page 22). Until it passes, deals will be made the old way: behind closed doors.



Looming decision: A voter is assisted by Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) officials before casting her ballot at the Mai Mai Bazaar Hall polling station in Johannesburg. Photo: Cecilia Seregni/AFP

What is the CSIR model, and why trust it?

The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), a state-funded science council, has predicted every South African election since 1999, with the SABC. It is not a poll. It groups voting districts that are alike, by province, demographics, income and past voting, and assumes similar places shift in similar ways, using early results to estimate the rest. It is usually accurate nationally once about 5% of results are in, to within about two percentage points. It is not infallible: in 2014 it was out by more than a point for the ANC and EFF, even with half the results known.

Where did the ANC's voters go?

Not home. Former ANC supporters have moved to other parties rather than stopping voting, says the analyst Paul Berkowitz of *The South Africa Brief*. In Gauteng, many went to ActionSA, which says it has taken 54 wards from the ANC, sweeping Tembisa and Atteridgeville and winning at least eight wards each in Soshanguve and Soweto. In KwaZulu-Natal they went to the MK Party, which is the biggest party in 12 councils and has an outright majority in three: Richmond, iMpendle and Johannes Phumani Phungula. Others chose the SACP, standing on its own for the first time. The DA, meanwhile, grew in its

own areas, helped by higher turnout among its supporters. The losses are steepest where the ANC once took its support for granted. According to the elections analyst Dawie Scholtz, it was tracking 23 points below its 2021 result in the townships of Nelson Mandela Bay and in Tembisa, 19 points down in Soweto and 16 in Khayelitsha. And its rural wall is cracking: it could fall below 50% in ten municipalities in North West, with seven at risk in Limpopo and eight in Mpumalanga, according to *The South Africa Brief*.

Is the ANC finished?

Not yet. It is still the biggest party nationally. But with almost three quarters of the results in, there is little sign of a late recovery. ANC leaders were still upbeat. "We remain the leading party," its first deputy secretary-general, Nomvula Mokonyane, told us. But her claim that the party was "already in control" of Kimberley does not survive the count: in Sol Plaatje, with every vote counted, the ANC has 37.9% and 25 of 65 seats. And Mokonyane signalled that its partnerships are in play: "Everything is up for review, including the relationship with the DA."

Did more people vote?

Yes, though turnout is still low. The IEC estimates about 54.5% of registered voters cast a ballot, up from 2021's record low. Berkowitz calls that "a good news story" for the legitimacy of the vote. The biggest jumps were in Gauteng: Johannesburg is projected at 52%, up more than nine points, with Tshwane and Ekurhuleni close behind. But BOSA's Mmusi Maimane says turnout was higher in the suburbs than in townships, where water, electricity and infrastructure backlogs are worst.

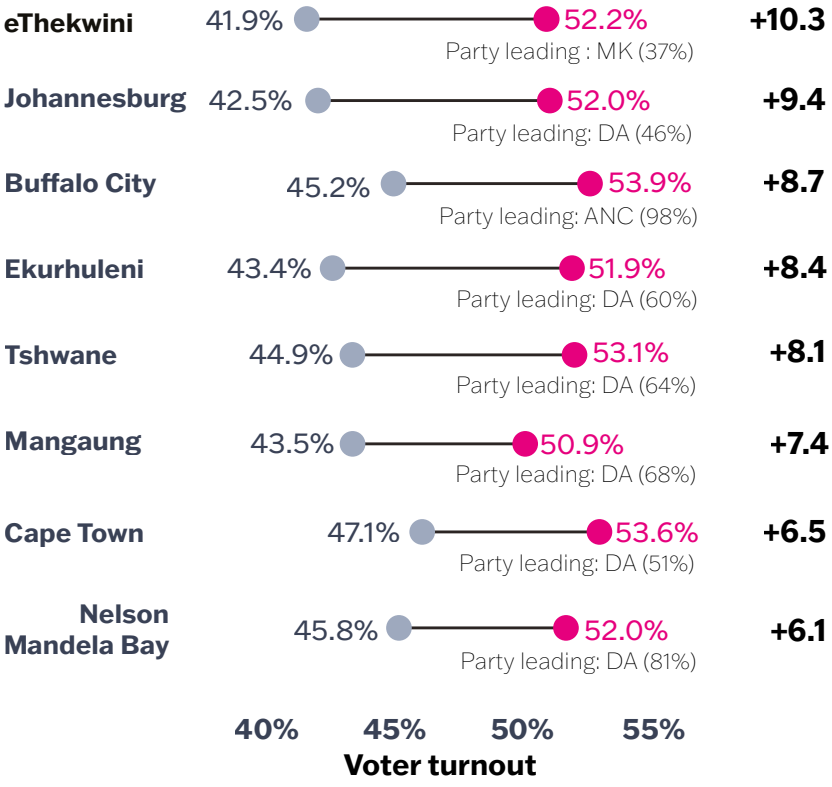
Who are the kingmakers, and what do they want?

In a country of hung councils, smaller parties decide who governs. ActionSA will talk to any party, its chairperson Michael Beaumont said, but only for coalitions that deliver services to all, fight corruption, end the "revolving door" of mayors and act on what he called the crisis of illegal immigration. BOSA's Mmusi Maimane, whose party contested Cape Town, Johannesburg, Tshwane and Ekurhuleni, told us his test is simple: "Is this coalition going to work for the people or not?" The IFP (4.6%, and the biggest party in three councils), the Freedom Front Plus (3.2%), the SACP (2.5%) and the Patriotic Alliance (2.3%, 128 seats, and five of Prince Albert's 10) will all have seats to bargain with. The newcomer to watch is the Service Delivery Party, launched this year by the Delmas businessman Thabo Motau. It has 5.6% of the vote in Mpumalanga and is the biggest party in Victor Khanye, which includes Delmas, with 39.5% and seven of the 17 seats, short of a majority.

More of us voted, everywhere

By Athandiwe Saba and Robyn Fester, as at 09:00 Friday

Turnout rose in every metro that has reported. The 2021 (actual) voter turnout is compared to the 2026 (projected) voter turnout. The cities that turned out least in 2021 have caught up the most.



Source: IEC. 2021 figures are final; the 2026 figures are projections, with between 32% and 80% of voting districts counted, as at 8am on 6 November 2026. EThekwini not yet projected. Note: the graph above is cropped, so the X-axis starts at 40% not 0%. Party leading = as at 6 November 2026.



Now we wait: Voters at the Lavisrylaan Primary School polling station in Bishop Lavis, Cape Town. Photo: Gianluigi Guercia/AFP

What can you do now?
Find out who won your ward: search your address on the IEC's results site, results.elections.org.za. Save your new councillor's name and number. Council meetings are open to the public, and the first sitting, where your mayor will be chosen, is within 14 days of the results. Write down what your councillor promised. You have five years to hold them to it.

Heard about the two Chris Pappases?
South Africa and the United States both voted this week, and both elected a Chris Pappas. In New Hampshire, Democrat Chris Pappas won a US Senate seat. In KwaZulu-Natal, the DA's Chris Pappas kept the uMngeni mayoralty with an increased majority.

Who won without a party?
Not every winner had a party's money or machinery behind them. By 8am on Friday, independent candidates had won 10 wards, with more than 92,000 votes between them, according to the IEC. It is a small number in a country of almost 4,500 wards. But each of those councillors won on their own name, not a party's, and in councils where no party has a majority, an independent could help decide who governs. If you've ever thought about standing yourself, they are proof that it can be done.

What did you see?
Did you vote, or sit this one out? Tell us why, and send us a photo of your voting station or street. (See page 9.)

Over to you

The votes are in. Now we want to hear from you

Last week we asked where you get news about your own area. Your answers: your street's WhatsApp group, other community WhatsApp groups, and community newspapers, one of which has just closed down after 30 years. That gap is exactly what *The Friday Paper* is trying to fill.

Some of you already share the paper. Others will, as long as it stays interesting. We'll do our best.

You also told us what the news is missing. A reader who works in alcohol harm reduction, with the non-profit Working for an Alcohol Safer South Africa (WASSA), noticed the drinking in our Mooi River story and asked for practical information on how communities can manage the sale of alcohol and reduce the harm it does. Another reader misses specialist journalists, especially in the arts. And one proud Joburger suggested a weekly column from people who love this city, called Jozi Maboneng, a place called home, and offered to write the first one. [We'll be in touch.]

Did you vote?

Whether you queued for hours or stayed at home, tell us why. On pages 12 to 15, six Joburgers explain why they sat this election out. We want to hear from everyone else too: what got you to the voting station, or what kept you away? Your answers could appear in our next edition on 13 November.

If someone forwarded you this paper, thank them. Then pass it on.

This week's giveaways

Win a book. One reader will win a copy of *Predatory Welfare: How Finance Capital Profiteers from Social Grants* by Erin Torkelson (Jacana). (See the extract on page 25.)

Win a night at the movies. Five readers will win a ticket to a special screening of *NAZA* at The Bioscope in Johannesburg at 6pm on Tuesday 17 November. The new documentary by Yuval Abraham and Rachel Szor, the Israeli co-directors of the Oscar-winning *No Other Land*, won the Special Jury Prize at this year's Venice Film Festival. Produced by *The Guardian*, it is built on testimony from Israeli soldiers about how targets were chosen in Gaza.

To enter, tell us who you are and which prize you'd like. Entries close on Thursday 12 November at 8am.

Last week's winner: Congratulations to Maurice Smithers, who wins a copy of *The Shipikisha Club* by Mubanga Kalimamukwento (Jacana).

Our turn to eat



Pop-up: The Maverick and Jane store in Rosebank was a taste of things to come. Photos: Maverick and Jane

A little popcorn, a lot of ambition

Thameenah Daniels

As we ogle the TV for the election results, there are few things better than settling in with your favourite snack. Politics makes me peckish. If you also love popcorn and are an adventurous soul, Joburg's Maverick and Jane might be the flavour you're looking for.

Behind the gourmet popcorn, inventive flavours, colourful branding and brand extensions into gelato and iced drinks is a story of South African entrepreneurship that deserves to be told. Founded by Rayhaan Jhetam in 2016, Maverick and Jane set out to give an everyday snack an extraordinary makeover. But what does it take to turn a simple idea into a competitive business?

Jhetam's passion for creating unconventional foods had a dual purpose: to create sustainable income for his parents while indulging his love for bold flavours and unexpected combinations.

Jhetam, a chartered accountant, has long had an entrepreneurial streak. While trading at markets during his school and university days, selling treats made by his mum, Jhetam started tinkering in the kitchen himself, creating variations of choc-chip, cappuccino and caramel burfees. He also worked in restaurants, bakeries and butcheries.

As a teen visiting Jozi, I remember being fascinated by the idea of something as plain as popcorn being transformed. Thank goodness Jhetam had the imagination to bring two worlds together. His burfee popcorn remains my flavour of choice.

His once-modest kiosk in Rosebank Mall has grown and Hassan Jhetam, his father, played an integral role in the brand building. The company's playful reimagining of an everyday favourite has found its way everywhere from wedding celebrations and special events to stockists across the country – and even into Checkers stores.

The journey to a gourmet popcorn brand has been long. But for Jhetam, there is still plenty of popping to do: "I still feel like we're only getting started."

Launching a business built around an unconventional idea in South Africa can be daunting. For Jhetam, the response from the public was encouraging. "Our motto is 'Choose adventure,' and people connected with both the products and what the brand stood for."

Maverick and Jane's journey to success has come with its share of challenges. For Jhetam, navigating the bumps has required faith, resilience and perseverance. "In the early days, we were importing corn all the way from Nebraska, which was a logistical challenge and costly, until we collaborated with local farmers to grow our unique strain of corn locally," he explains.



Snack, reimagined: Maverick and Jane's burfee popcorn takes the corn and makes it pop.

Maverick and Jane also felt the impact of Covid. But perhaps the most difficult chapter for Jhetam was the loss of his father, a personal blow that also affected him professionally.

As Jhetam looks towards the next chapter, growth and expansion remain firmly on the cards. But scaling the business doesn't mean losing sight of what made it special in the first place. He is determined to preserve the creativity, personality and sense of adventure that have shaped Maverick and Jane over the past decade.

THE MORNING AFTER

‘What have I done?’

After all the build-up, the votes are cast. LESTER KIEWIT wakes up next to his choice, and wonders what on earth he was thinking.

You know that feeling the morning after a one-night stand? You wake up, turn over, look at the person lying next to you and think: “Good Lord. What have I done?”

Then you remember. You remember exactly what you’ve done. You remember why you did it. Because the alternative was even more appalling; the other one was even more kak.

It’s the morning after South Africa’s local government elections, and there’s no morning-after pill for this mistake. No Plan B for the electoral whoopsies. I’ll have to live with my regret and the consequences of my actions.

It’s my quinquennial pattern. I read the manifestos. I follow what the parties are saying in the news. Some of the politicians I like, but they steal. Some are genuinely well-meaning, but I don’t do trickle-down economics. Some have pretty decent policies, but I like big black caucuses, large and full, with branch members and internal democracy.

In a sense, they’re all fine. But they’re all kak too. I have to choose the best of the kak ones

So on election day, I go to the booth, I hold my nose and I make my mark. And I always feel like I need a shower afterwards.



Graphic: Kagiso Diale

This morning I’m experiencing a particularly intense post-nut clarity of democracy. Could I have done better? Was there a more attractive option? Or am I simply the victim of my own appalling judgement?

I confess, it’s been a long time since I was jealous of the Americans. They’ve had a torrid few years with Don the Con and the milquetoast Democrats. But in this week’s midterms, they had politicians who actually seemed to inspire

people. Who got people excited about democracy again! Abdul El-Sayed. James Talarico. AOC, a total babe and a complete boss. And hovering over all of them, New York's Zohran Mamdani.

Oh, to have a Mamdani.

Imagine being wooed by a politician. Imagine someone looking you in the eye and saying: I see you. I see how hard you're working, baby. I see how unaffordable everything has become. I see how the system is rigged against you and other working people. And I have a plan to do something about it.

Imagine being seduced by an idea. Instant mental pregnancy.

But, as Professor Sean Jacobs pointed out on Facebook, South Africans say they want a Mamdani, and our attitudes to socialism and the poor suggest otherwise. Our Wi-Fi-connected, champagne-socialist chattering classes would probably run screaming from his actual policies. I mean, how else does Adam Habib cheer for Lula but vote for Zille?

We want the romance of redistribution, provided it doesn't redistribute anything we happen to own. We want our CBDs fixed, as long as the fixing quietly pushes out poor people, artists, artisans and culture.

We want foreign investment, and we look the other way when the pounds, dollars and euros gentrify our neighbourhoods.

We want the poetry. We want the grand vision. We want a politician to sweep us off our feet. But the moment they mention rent control, wealth taxes or social housing, we start checking the exits and clutching our property portfolios.

So I made my choice from a field of parties that could charitably be described as two B-teams playing a friendly in the rain, neither of which has ever met a ball.

I selected a captain for the B-team.

And I don't want to sound ungrateful. I understand democracy. I understand compromise. I understand that governing a city is a complicated business involving budgets, potholes, sewage and electricity. And yes, the boring stuff needs to be done, and done well.

We want the poetry. We want the grand vision. We want a politician to sweep us off our feet – until they mention rent control or wealth taxes

But for God's sake, couldn't somebody at least buy me dinner first?

I want to be wooed. I want to be inspired. I want someone to make the future feel exciting.

Instead, I'm lying here the morning after, staring at the ceiling, wondering how to sneak out without them noticing. Was it fun? Did I post a picture of my inked thumb online afterwards? (If there's an OnlyToes, surely there's an OnlyThumbs.) Did I get my free Wimpy coffee? Yes, yes and yes.

But the worst part? I can't even ghost them. I've got them for the next five years. ●

Photo essay

The ones who did not vote

While Anna Tlali sat in a salon chair in Braamfontein having her hair done, a queue to vote slowly formed close by at Joubert Park, the largest IEC station in Johannesburg. She was not going to join it. She wasn't alone. In Joburg, the country's most contested metro, about 48% of registered voters sat this one out, according to projections. That is roughly 1.16 million people, more than twice as many as voted for any single party. Millions more had not registered at all. RUMANA AKOOB spoke to Joburgers who did not visit the polling booth on Wednesday.



Anna Tlali, 32, Midrand.
Anna voted for the first time in the last election and saw nothing change; this time she didn't go. Her house has had no water for seven days. "We've been going to buy water every single day. Collecting water to bath has been a struggle." She moved from Fourways just this month, thinking a different area might be different. "People will say one area is DA, one area is ANC. No difference, like at all." What would get her to vote? "I actually need to see physical change." She works late shifts and travels home in the dark past potholes and broken streetlights. "I'm scared for my life, but I have to do it. Even the money I'm earning just helps me to go back to work."



Cleodine Louw, 33, Eldorado Park. She came to the polling station, but not to vote. "Just to lift up myself, come and see people voting." Her whole family cast ballots; she last did in 2021, for the DA, and saw nothing change. Unemployed since 2014 apart from one job in Randburg two years ago, she lists what her community is facing: drugs, gangsterism, friends and family dying. Last week the water went and the electricity with it. "Our fridge was off. Our meat defrosted." Does she believe one person can make a difference with a vote? "I can understand that, but there's no unity in this community." Still, she adds, "I hope for a change."



Lwazi Morgan, 18, Orlando West. This was the first election Lwazi was old enough to vote in. He didn't register. "Voting doesn't do anything in terms of fixing our country." A matric pupil who wants to study law, he grew up near Mandela's house and the Tutu house in Soweto, and his grandmother was part of the 1976 uprising. He knows the history but for him, that is not enough. "For our generation, voting is obsolete." Most of his friends stayed away too, for the same reason: promises of safer streets, fixed roads and fixed schools never arrived. What frightens him is what comes after the degree. "Jobs are not easy to find in this country. Even though we're voting, it doesn't seem to change the employment rate."



Aimee Hefer, 28, Melville. Aimee moved recently and was working on registration day, so she didn't register. "There's other stuff in life I need to be worrying about: health, money and shit like that, compared to voting." That and the water and electricity issues. A friend had queued an hour and a half that morning. If it were online, she says, she might have bothered. A teacher with a BEd, she left the profession because she lost faith in the system and now has a job working at a bar. What she's learnt is that community, not a degree, gets you through a door. Would she vote again? "Maybe, for the shits and giggles. To feel like a member of society. But that's the only thing I'd do it for."



Louis Molepo, 40, Killarney. This is the second election Louis has chosen to sit out. Born in Limpopo, he came to Johannesburg in 2010 and studied ICT; today he cleans a building as a general worker. Back home there are tarred roads and an RDP house. In Killarney, "it's worse. Streets damaged. Nothing happens." He has a son in school and a mother, sisters and brothers to feed. "When you give them your qualification, they want experience. How can I get this experience?" Politicians, he says, come around before the vote and are gone within a fortnight. "They will drive expensive cars, living nicely. Then you're going to be left struggling."



Ronella Nomazwe Mpobhi, 37, Thabo Mbeki Village, Cosmo City. Ronella came from Limpopo in 2004 and has lived in this informal settlement ever since, voting in every election along the way. This time she stayed home. "I don't see the changes." A single mother of three, she has been out of work for about two years, since a contract picking up litter on the streets ended. "We all vote, but the chances of working, we don't get. They choose their people to go in." The ground under her shack is wet all the time, rain or no rain; she has raised it with every local leader she can find. "There's no leader who has helped me here." Promises, she says, arrive every time there's a vote, and none are kept. "So I don't see a reason for me to vote." What would change her mind? "If they say, here's the job, and you start working. Then I can go and vote, because then I work for my kids."

All photos: Rumana Akoob

Did you sit this one out? Tell us why. Your answers could be published in our next edition on 13 November.

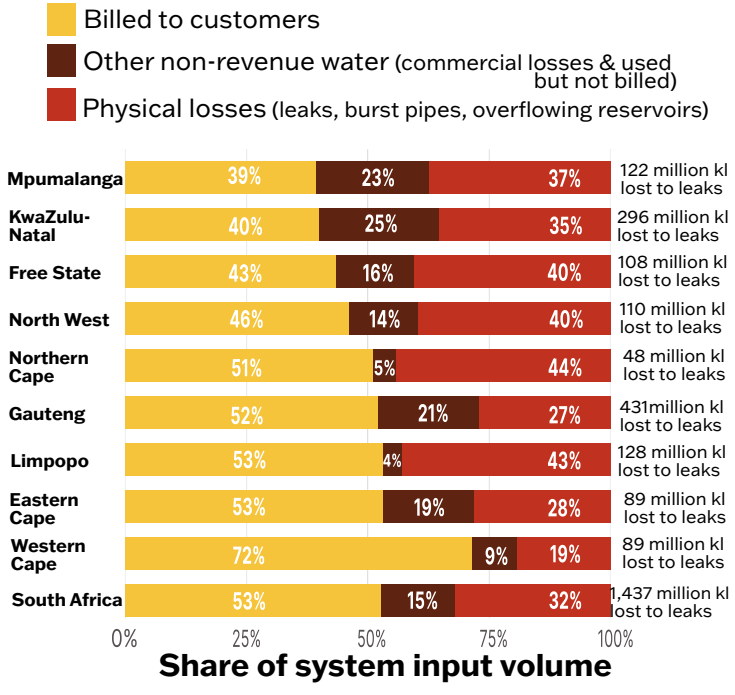
THE WATER ELECTIONS

Few issues have encapsulated voter discontent and – hopefully – spurred voter action in this year's local governmental elections as much as water: access to it, billing issues, outages and worries about its safety. These graphs drill into the numbers. By ROBYN FESTER & RO MANOIM

Where does the water go?

Of the 4,488 million kilolitres of water put into municipal systems in 2023/24, only 53% was billed to customers.

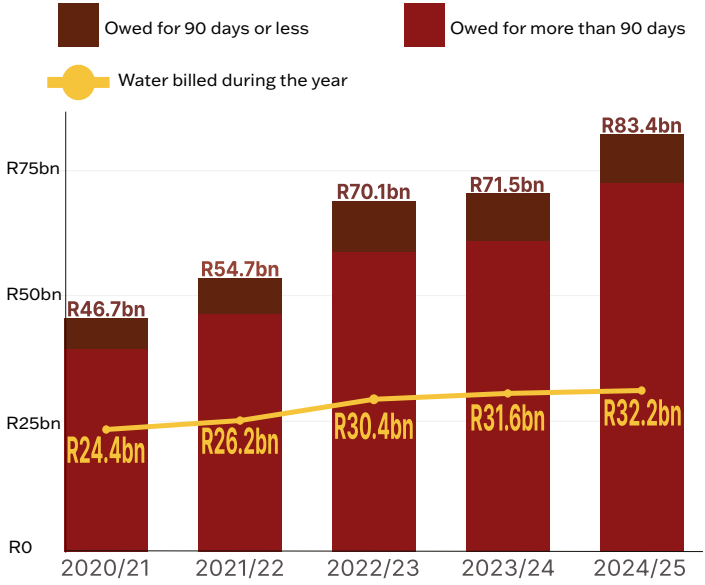
40% was lost: 32% through leaks and burst, 8% to theft, illegal connections and meter or billing errors.
7% was used but never billed. Together this 47% of water is referred to as "non-revenue water".



Source: Department of Water and Sanitation, 2025 No Drop Progress Assessment (2023/24 financial year), released March 2026: national water balance and provincial water balance table. For the 25 water services authorities that did not submit data, DWS estimated figures. 1 kilolitre = 1,000 litres.

Unpaid water bills owed to municipalities have almost doubled

By 2024/25 money owed to municipalities for water was 2.6 times (45% after inflation) what they bill for water in a whole year. 88% of the debt had been owed for more than 90 days, and 61% had been owed for more than a year. Debt that old is rarely recovered.



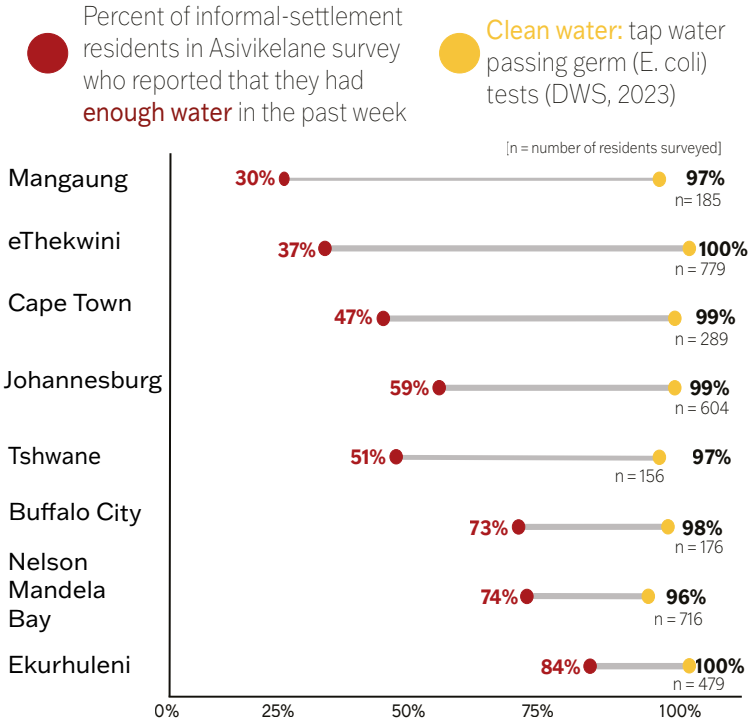
Municipal financial year (July — June)

Note: This data excludes Johannesburg, Tshwane and eThekwini (incomplete data).

Source: National Treasury, Municipal Money.
220 municipalities evaluated. Rand as recorded each year, not adjusted for inflation. Some 2024/25 figures not audited.

Metros' tap water passes tests, but residents don't get enough water

Cape Town's tap water passed 99.8% of germ tests, yet more than half of informal-settlement residents surveyed (53%) said they did not have enough water in the past week

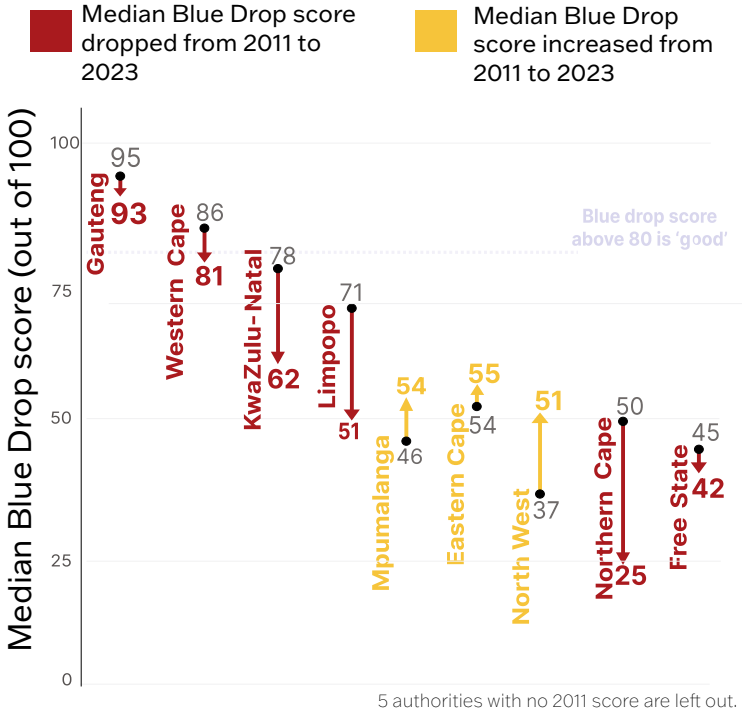


Source: [1.] DWS IRIS, drinking water microbiological compliance, 2023
Note - in this chart the two measures cover different people and periods, combined here to show how a particular population's experience may be in conflict with the national data.

Blue Drop scores keep dropping

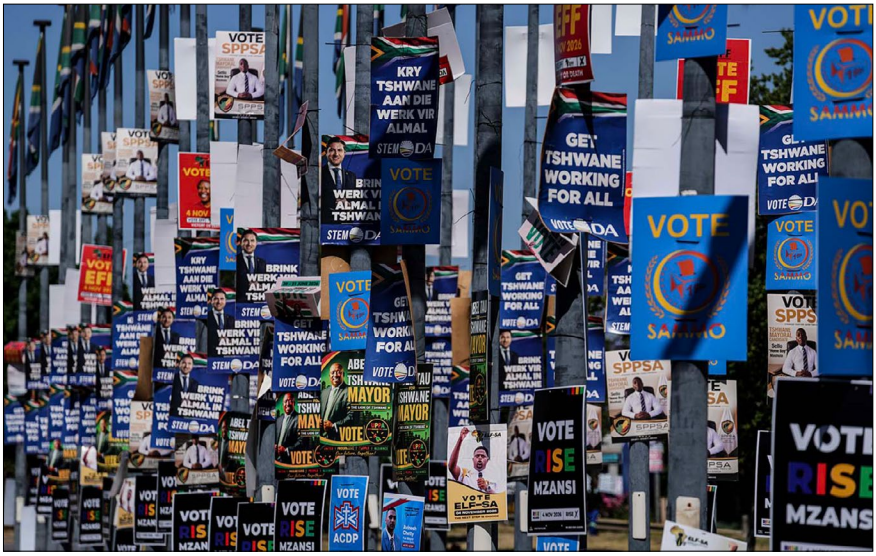
The Department of Water and Sanitation evaluates each Water Service Authority's water quality. Each Water Service Authority receives a drinking water quality score (Blue Drop score): management, distribution, quality and compliance are evaluated.

There are 138 Water Service Authorities with 2011 and 2023 scores. The individual scores are consolidated as a median for each province. 87 of 138 authorities scored lower in 2023 than in 2011.



Sources: Water Rights Tracker WSA profiles (Wits/SAHRC, 2026), from DWS Blue Drop reports 2011 and 2023 (the 2023 report covers 2021/22)

ELECTIONS



Poles apart: Coalitions are our likely future, but the legislation is lagging. Photo: Themba Hadebe/AP

Stuck in Parliament: the Bill that could tame coalition chaos

The Coalition Bill would make parties publish their coalition deals and curb hostile takeovers of councils. But it is still sitting in Parliament, so the new councils will be formed under the old rules. NIREN TOLSI explains what we are missing.

As horse-trading between political parties and independent councillors sinks into the manure of political – and personal – negotiation after Wednesday's local government elections, parliament's failure to pass the Municipal Structures Amendment Bill, or "Coalition Bill", in time is likely to stall effective, transparent and accountable governance.

The Bill sets out new timeframes for finalising coalitions and new procedures for votes of no confidence in municipal office-bearers, and calls for coalition

agreements to be gazetted and legally binding. Cabinet approved it in July, and it was introduced to Parliament in August, where it still sits.

The chair of Parliament's co-operative governance and traditional affairs portfolio committee, Dr Zweli Mkhize, pointed to the tawdry state of South African politics and argued that "coalition discipline" was needed, and that votes of no confidence in mayors, whips and speakers should be less "hostile take-over bids" and more about programmes and clean governance.

The takeover phenomenon is plain in the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection's (Mistra's) 2026 Coalition Barometer, which surveyed 175 of South Africa's 213 directly elected municipal councils. It found 28 instances of the DA and the ANC – the largest blocs in the Government of National Unity – pushing no-confidence motions against each other to replace their opponents. Eighty of the 175 municipalities had had different administrations since the 2021 elections; in 46 of them, there had been what Mistra calls "a true collapse", with the largest governing party losing office altogether. Johannesburg's coalition carousel over the past five years is the starkest example, putting petty politicking and self-aggrandisement ahead of its citizens.

A recent government report found that the number of hung councils had grown from 24 in 2000 to 81 after the 2021 elections. Governance experts say the result is stalled social programmes, operational inefficiency and slower delivery of electricity, water, road repairs and refuse removal.

So what are South Africans missing out on until the Bill has passed Parliament and the National Council of Provinces?



Shake-up: An official shows an empty ballot box during the first sitting of the new South African Parliament in Cape Town on June 14, 2024. Photo: Wikus de Wet/AFP

First, coalition agreements between parties and independent ward councillors would have to be gazetted, along with any changes to them. The aim is to make parties agree on a substantive programme of action rather than join coalitions out of self-interest, and to make those agreements public and legally enforceable. Municipal whips would gain a new duty to help parties and independents stick to the agree-



All together now: The Municipal Structures Act needs to be amended so that coalitions stand a better chance of working well. Photo: Nardus Engelbrecht/AP

ment, and could not be removed within 12 months of appointment.

Second, the deadline for agreeing coalitions, holding the first council meeting and appointing office-bearers would be extended from 14 to 30 days.

Third, the chair of the municipal public accounts committee could not come from the governing party or any of its coalition partners, a move meant to strengthen financial oversight and weed out corruption and patronage networks.

Nor could an independent councillor in the governing coalition hold the post, unless every independent is part of the same coalition. Candidates for council would need "experience, skills or qualifications relevant to local government", and councillors and officials found guilty of corruption, constitutional violations or breaches of the Municipal Finance Management Act would be removed.

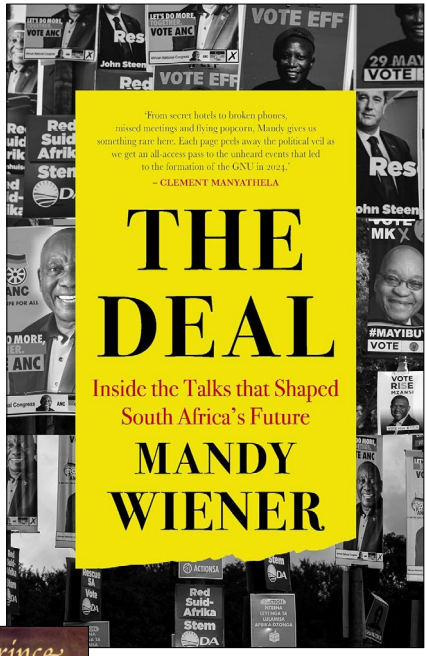
Finally, no-confidence motions would require notice, with a formal chance for office-bearers to respond. If a mayor is removed, the mayoral committee would be dissolved immediately and a new mayor elected within 14 days. Votes to remove office-bearers would be held by a show of hands or a secret ballot.

Until the Municipal Structures Act is amended, though, none of this applies, and coalition instability after the 2026 election is likely to continue like raw sewage bubbling in the street.

BOOKS

What to read while politicians are haggling over coalitions

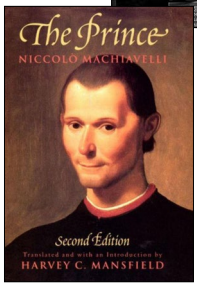
Shaun de Waal



The Deal, Mandy Wiener's book about how the Government of National Unity was formed after the last national elections, is a detailed look at that tortuous process; she spoke to everyone involved. It would make enlightening reading matter for that period when, once the local government elections are done, the inevitable coalitions have to be arranged.

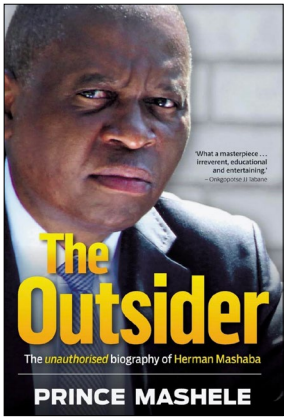
The parties have two weeks to form coalitions once the results of the poll are announced. An awful lot of local governments, and especially that of our greatest city, Johannesburg, will require coalitions because none of the big parties will get an outright majority.

Certainly *The Deal* helps one see that it will be a painful process to construct those coalitions, and that the horsetrading can get bogged down in trivial minutiae or stuck in the thickets of sensitive egos. Never mind intra-party tensions.

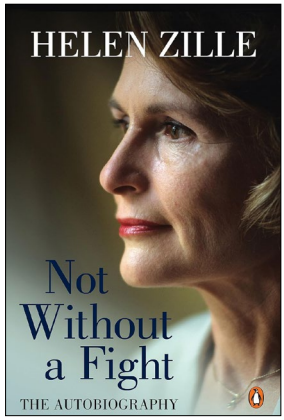


Presumably you'll have read the parties' manifestos, so you'll know what you voted for – except of course that what's in the manifesto doesn't always come forth in reality, as we know from the several hundred years the ANC has been in charge of so many municipalities.

Perhaps it'd be best to go for key works about how power works and how lines of command can be manipulated into position. I'd go for a short, sharp work such as *The Prince* by Niccolo

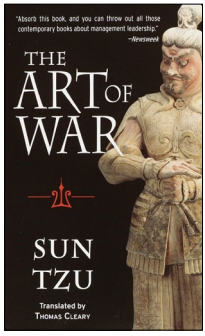






Machiavelli, which was written in the Renaissance but gives a good sense of the mechanisms and projections of personal power.

If you think South Africa's elections are not about personal power at this stage, I'd refer you to *The Outsider*, the flattering biography of Herman Mashaba, which he secretly paid one "independent" political analyst something like R12-million to write for him, or perhaps to Micah Reddy and Pauli van Wyk's *Malema*, which is about our Juju's complicated finances and what that says about the cult of personality that drives the Economic Freedom Fighters.



I might also recommend Helen Zille's autobiography, *Not Without a Fight*, which I thought not bad when I read it a decade or so ago, except it's even longer than *The Deal* – actually, it's even longer than the Bible – and Zille subsequently besmirched her impeccably liberal literary reputation by writing an anti-woke tract (*Stay Woke, Go Broke*) that revealed her to be as illiberal as a Maga Republican recycling the swart gevaar.

So what are the options? Maybe it would refresh the mind and help grapple with these issues to read *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu, a masterwork of military (and thus political) strategy. After all, it has been a bestseller for about 2,500 years. But you may end up wishing that our politicians had read it, or wishing you could get into that negotiating chamber and point out why they are having such trouble getting their act together.

Then again, given how stressful those two weeks of haggling will be, perhaps it'd be best to simply take the time off and read something excessively light and funny. Unfortunately, in this moment I just can't think of a book that's funny enough. ●

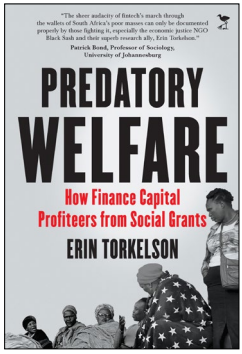
NON-FICTION

The man nobody asked about

South Africa's social grants are meant to keep families afloat. In *Predatory Welfare*, the geographer Erin Torkelson spent seven years following the money, from grant queues and grocery stores to Parliament and the Constitutional Court, and found lenders treating those grants as collateral. In this extract, she asks why one death made the news, and one man in the story did not.

In August 2023, Bongeka Buso and her three children were found dead in their home near Butterworth in the Eastern Cape. The man who found them was a debt collector, who had arrived two days after her child support grants were paid.

Unlike most stories of poverty, which are rarely considered newsworthy, this was extensively covered in the national press. Though the debt collector featured as a curious detail in each article, he remained a shadowy presence. The newspapers did not name him or interview him; they did not mention where he came from or who he worked for; and they did not recount how much the Buso family borrowed, at what rate of interest, and over what period of time. No one from the National Credit Regulator was asked to comment on whether he worked for a registered moneylender, or if his collection practices were legal. By not investigating his relationship to the family, the press tacitly endorsed the social consensus that debts must be repaid at any cost. His visit to Bongeka was deemed unrelated to her actions.



● This is an edited extract from *Predatory Welfare: How Finance Capital Profiteers from Social Grants* by Erin Torkelson (Jacana Media, 2026, R340). Torkelson is a senior lecturer in geography at the University of the Western Cape, and works with the Black Sash, Open Secrets and the Institute for Economic Justice on the social grant system.

● If you are struggling, or worried about someone, call the South African Depression and Anxiety Group's suicide crisis line on 0800 567 567.

The Big Picture



Alone in the booth: A voter marks her ballot in Hillbrow, Johannesburg, in 2021. Five years on, the city has voted again. Now comes the wait to see who will govern it. Photo: Mzingenkosi Sibanda/AFP

"All human wisdom is contained in these two words: 'Wait and hope.'"

— Alexandre Dumas, *The Count of Monte Cristo*

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