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## The Poor Performance of the ANC During Local Government Elections: What is Next for the Ruling Party?

Michael N Khwela  
*University of Limpopo*

Most South Africans believed that 27 April 1994 was going to bring the Republic of Azania with Comrade Nelson Mandela as the president. The Convention for a Democratic South Africa (Codesa) agreement had been designed cunningly to protect the white minority to retain what was not legitimately theirs. During the first democratic elections in the country where everyone who was eighteen years and above was allowed to vote, the citizenry was excited except for the few who had enjoyed life under apartheid. This was a milestone and the whole world celebrated this occasion (the lion and the lamb had been transformed and were jostling in friendly combat, and the world was marveling at the miracle of the 'peaceful' demise of apartheid). Freedom fighters from the liberation movements were split with some saying no to the elections and others vowing to continue with the elections. The freedom fighters who were against the negotiated settlement believed that this meant that the landless and those without property would continue in the status quo no matter how many times they voted (Mphahlele, 2010). The ANC won the first democratic national elections in 1994 with an overwhelming majority and achieved 62.6% of the national vote. Since then, the ANC's share of the vote has declined during local government elections. For instance, in the 1995 local government elections, the ANC's share was only 58%, which was a 4.6% decline. According to Myburgh (2016), this was due to the opposition being better able to bring their supporters to the polls better than the ANC. This decline has been a trend and included the 2016 and 2021 local government elections where the ANC's share was only 54% down from the 62.1% of the 2014 national elections. In general, during the 2016 local government elections when measured in terms of votes in the proportional (PR) representational ballot, the ANC voters had dropped by 3.25m from 2014 national elections and when juxtaposed with the 2011 local government elections in terms of the votes in the PR ballot the decline was 3.31m.

**Keywords:** Service delivery, Local government, South African elections, Opposition parties, Factionalism, Democracy.

### Introduction

The general knowledge in South African politics is that in terms of the Constitution, there are three spheres of government, the national, provincial and local sphere, each with its own service delivery mandate (the Constitution, Act 108, 1996). Local government

is where service delivery is expected from the government since this is the sphere that is closest to the people. Service delivery protests are experienced in the country especially just before elections as people may not be satisfied with the level of services they are receiving from the government (Mayburgh, 2016; Isike & Onapajo, 2017; Schulz-Herzenberg, 2019). If local government fails, the government and the ANC fail. Enhanced political management in the municipalities should bring about efficient and effective local governance. Despite all the protests just before the elections, the ruling party does not lose its hegemony, which could presumably be due to voter loyalty to the ANC (Schenoni, 2017). One can conclude that South African citizens do not want to hold the politicians accountable but would rather stick to their party despite its poor performance. The loyalty of the voters may be centred on the fact that there is no other party in the country that they trust or that brings an alternative agenda for them (Schulz-Herzenberg, 2019). Alternatively, they would opt for a different leader but maintain loyalty to the party. During the latest local government elections of 2021, the voter turnout of registered voters was below 50% (Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC-SA), 2022) yet the ruling party's hegemony during these elections persisted. This could imply that the South African voters have lost hope and feel betrayed by their government and political parties.

The South African Constitution advocates the liberal-democratic perceptions of democracy where political parties can engage in free and fair recurrent elections. This liberal model of democracy is applicable to general and local government elections in the country. The advantages of the ANC are its policies on racialism and the economy as they do not exclude any race in the country, which is a challenge for almost all opposition parties, who seemingly, do not have policies but are engrossed with criticising the policies of the ANC (Schulz-Herzenberg, 2019). There are currently 278 municipalities in South Africa, comprising eight metropolitans, 44 districts and 226 local municipalities (IEC-SA, 2022). Metropolitan municipalities (metros) are largely independent local government structures with authority to exercise exclusive municipal executive and legislative authority within their area. Metros are the most urbanised areas and must have more than 500 000 voters. Metro councils manage the delivery of services and the development of infrastructure.

The purpose of the paper is to determine the causes of the decline in the hegemony of the ANC during elections. The study is a desktop study and uses secondary data from journal articles, published political books and many other documents with high quality original research that advances scholarly debate in all areas of political theory.

## **Rationale**

The African National Congress (ANC) was formed in 1912 by the Congress of the People and ever since has struggled for the liberation of the citizens of South Africa. The formation of the ANC was due to the apartheid system of oppression that was practised by the then