

MISTRA

COALITIONS BAROMETER 2021 - 2023

HIGH-LEVEL SUMMARY

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The *MISTRA Coalitions Barometer 2021–2023* research project explores emerging trends in coalition politics in South Africa at a crucial time – when political parties are in a state of flux and new coalition practices and cultures are being consolidated, both in party politics and in governance. With many observers and scholars surmising that the emerging coalition practice in South Africa reflected turmoil, instability and compromised attention to quality developmental governance, it became imperative for MISTRA as a policy think tank to undertake a project aimed at systematically analysing coalition governance and related party-political practice.

The focus of the research at this stage is on the roughly two years of local government coalitions in metropolitan and local municipalities across the provinces, from the local government elections of 2021 to the second half of 2023. The core objectives of the research are two-fold: to identify the unfolding dynamics and South Africa's emerging cultures of coalition politics and governance, and to use the knowledge to propose avenues for improvement, which could possibly also be of relevance in the provincial and national spheres. This high-level summary presents the trends derived from a qualitative database of case studies of 70 metropolitan and local coalition governments in South Africa.

Party politics and relentless office-seeking behaviour are crucial factors in reducing the functionality of coalition governments, and so the *Barometer* research project and this summary focus first on this key dimension. A second core factor is governance capacity, as expressed through local government functionality and professional municipal bureaucracies. The *Barometer* research shows that while capacity factors affect all municipalities in South Africa, the instability of coalition councils often exacerbates the ineffectuality of municipal bureaucracies. Clearly, it is not only coalition government that renders councils unstable and prone to deficits in quality governance. However, because these coalition councils stand at the interface between broader party-political shifts and potential future changes of government, party-political volatility rises, accountability is obfuscated, and governance outcomes become more uncertain.

The *Barometer* research makes sense of these changes by using a typology of coalitions formed in local government and by setting out the key trends that define coalition politics in South Africa circa 2023. The analysis is based on the analytical framework that evolved through MISTRA's report of December 2021, *When Wedding Bells Ring: Coalitions with(out) concord* (MISTRA, 2021b). It is also anchored in MISTRA's edited volume, *Marriages of Inconvenience* (MISTRA, 2021a). The current summary is based on the research conducted for the *MISTRA Coalitions Barometer 2021–2023* (forthcoming).

Party politics and relentless office-seeking behaviour are crucial factors in reducing the functionality of coalition governments, and so the Barometer research project and this summary focus first on this key dimension.

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Acronyms

ABC	Abantu Batho Congress
ACDP	African Christian Democratic Party
AG	Auditor-General
AGSA	Auditor-General South Africa
AIC	African Independent Congress
AIM	African Integrity Movement
ANC	African National Congress
APEMO	African People's Movement
ATM	African Transformation Movement
AUF	Active United Front
AULA	All Unemployment Labour Alliance
CFP	Community Freedom Party
CFRA	Cederberg First Residents Association
CoGTA	Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs
COPE	Congress of the People
CoSA	Community Solidarity Association
CSA	Compatriots South Africa
DA	Democratic Alliance
DOP	Defenders of the People
DPSA	Dikwankwetla Party of South Africa
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
F4SD	Forum 4 Service Delivery
FF+	Freedom Front Plus
GCF	Gamagara Community Forum
Icosa	Independent Civic Organisation of South Africa
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
KCM	Kareeberg Civic Movement
KDF	Karoo Democratic Force
KGP	Karoo Gemeenskap Party
KIP	Kannaland Independent Party
KIM	Knysna Independent Movement
LCF	Lekwa Community Forum
LGE2016	Local Government Elections 2016
LGE2021	Local Government Elections 2021

MAOC	Merafong Agents of Change
NA	Northern Alliance
NFP	National Freedom Party
NHM	New Horizon Movement
NMB	Nelson Mandela Bay
OGI	Oudtshoorn Gemeenskap Inisiatief
PA	Patriotic Alliance
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress of Azania
PAU	Power of African Unity
PDC	Plett Democratic Congress
RPP	Randfontein People's Party
SARKO	South African Royal Kingdoms Organisation
SCM	Siyathemba Community Movement
SDBIP	Service Delivery and Budget Implementation Plan
SEFM	Socialist Economic Freedom Movement
TFSD	Thabazimbi Forum for Service Delivery
TRA	Thabazimbi Residents Association
UDM	United Democratic Movement
UIM	United Independent Movement
VAAL	Vaal Alternative Alliance Lekgotla

<p>STABILITY AND CHANGE IN COALITION GOVERNMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just over half of SA’s local coalition governments have been stable since LGE2021. • The bulk of the rest have changed once. • Stability in its own right does not equate to effective government. • Some stable coalition governments are under administration or in a shambles. 	<p>MOTIONS OF NO-CONFIDENCE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmed as one of the scourges of coalition government. • Changes in local coalition government most likely to come via a motion of no-confidence. • ‘Frivolous’ grounds – impossible not to have reasons to file votes of no-confidence. • Provincial governments are sometimes complicit. 	<p>COALITION-OPERATOR POLITICAL PARTIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Majority manufacturing’ is the name of the coalitions game – all grab strategic opportunities. • A handful are relentless operators – will start with a bloc of preference, but coalition-crossing is no problem. • Stand-out operators are PA; many 1–2 seat parties in metros; EFF, ActionSA, etc. 	
<p>BY-ELECTIONS AND CHANGE IN COALITION GOVERNMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In several councils, the balance of power is changed via by-election. • Examples are Prince Albert (DA) Mthonjaneni (IFP), Merafong City (ANC). • There is often turmoil in councils as ward councillors break ranks in council votes, defect, force by-elections, and perhaps win for a new party. 	<p>Key MISTRA Coalitions Barometer findings</p> <p>TRENDS IN HUNG COUNCIL POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE, 2021-2023</p>		<p>COALITIONS AS MULTIPARTY FORCES - NUMBER OF PARTIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance of power is often in the hands of multiple micro parties – in large councils, multiple micros have considerable power. • The bulk of stable coalitions have one big party (esp. ANC/DA) requiring minimal top-up, e.g., by PA, AIC, Al Jama-ah, FF+, community party, etc. • There is mostly support by loyal party blocs – with deviations.
<p>COALITION AGREEMENTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal agreements are few and far between – e.g., NMB ANC–local unity and DA general bloc pact. But they are easily breached. • Agreements are rather evidenced by positions and portfolio allocation; vote abstention; walkouts; etc. • They are often supplemented by the confidence-and-supply format. • Occasionally they permit main party rule on minority status. 			<p>MAJOR PARTY REALIGNMENT AND POSITIONING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A major source of council realignment was the EFF’s move to the ANC, away from the IFP; the NFP linking to the ANC. • Strategic calculations for future elections. • Stability of proportional vs mayoral executive in KwaZulu-Natal neutralised by party moves. • Transitions to proportional system may be discredited.
<p>PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS, COURTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several coalition municipalities are under administration: Lekwa, Msunduzi, Mtubatuba, iNkosi Langalibalele, AbaQulusi. • Multiple others face dismal governance (!Kheis, Kannaland, Thembalihle, eDumbe, etc.); interventions would be justified – but limited past success. • Provincial governments on occasion are involved in motions of no-confidence, etc. • Courts are often the final recourse on motions no-confidence. 	<p>AUDITOR-GENERAL AND CAPACITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit opinions from the AGSA are one of the reliable comparatives; early days re post-LGE2021 progress. • Stable coalition governments are not guaranteed to be in a favourable audit category. • Large numbers in ‘unqualified with findings’ category. • Local coalition governments suffer a host of problems, as most majority councils do – limited resources, capacity and skills; low-income base; poor and declining infrastructure. 	<p>AGSA, CoGTA RISK AND MISTRA STABILITY INDEX</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of the 11 coalition councils with ‘unqualified without findings’ AG outcomes, 7 are on founding coalition dispensations and 3 on first turnover. • Thus, ‘stable’ generally, with Western Cape factor (2 ANC and 5 DA linked); all of Western Cape cases except George also on favourable (stable or low) CoGTA risk assessment. • In the rest of the provinces, coalition antics often exacerbate existing challenges. 	

The forthcoming Barometer report (MISTRA, 2023) is an extensively referenced repository of qualitative data related to South Africa's coalition municipalities, from the local government elections of 2021 (LGE2021) onwards.

Scope, analytical framework, methodology and timeframes

The *MISTRA Coalitions Barometer* research project encompasses detailed qualitative empirical analyses, based on nine provincial reports and an analysis of overall trends in the evolving coalition politics at municipalities across South Africa. The project comprises a systematic monitoring of party-political and selected governance development trends at the metropolitan and local hung councils. The monitoring project commenced at the time of the establishment of the municipal councils following the local government elections (LGE) of November 2021. In early 2022, detailed monitoring commenced as the new council administrations were settling into their responsibilities. This early start to the monitoring of the coalition municipalities meant that the report could systematically track the unfolding events as well as the back-and-forth composition, solidification and sometimes collapse of coalitions and their governments. The forthcoming *Barometer* report (MISTRA, 2023) is an extensively referenced repository of qualitative data related to South Africa's coalition municipalities, from the local government elections of 2021 (LGE2021) onwards. It is anticipated that the *Barometer* will be an ongoing project.

The research used indicators that were based on the operationalisation of base phenomena and trends in coalition formation. The research team used a combination of methodologies to capture the data. The report is based on document analysis, media monitoring (with particular reference to local community media), interviews with selected municipal officials, desktop research and selected social media to triangulate some of the information that was gathered. Interviews (telephonic and email) were conducted where publicly available information was insufficient to establish relevant practices and trends.

Local government coalitions and the context of transitions in party politics

Coalitions in local government in South Africa fall within the context of the party-political transitions that are under way. A large proportion of the 2021 hung councils had in the 2016–2021 term still been under ANC leadership. The move away from African National Congress (ANC) local government predominance picked up in LGE2021. To some extent there was a comparable process in the Western Cape, where several municipalities that had previously been Democratic Alliance (DA)-controlled entered coalition status in 2021. In most cases, the shifts did not bring definitive changes away from the ANC or the DA. For example, the ANC tended to remain the biggest party, still enjoying the strongest electoral support despite ceding outright control. In KwaZulu-Natal, the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) led coalitions in many municipalities. Here the dynamic was slightly different – the IFP had been resuscitated, winning back support in 2021 that it had lost following the emergence (and

subsequent decline) of the National Freedom Party (NFP). The dynamic around the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) was also significant. The growth of the party was sufficient to ensure that it would become a primary kingmaker at many sites, tilting the balance between, for example, the ANC and the DA. Another potent coalition-related component was the diverse collections of micro (often community) parties that won one or two (mostly proportional representation) seats and which subsequently could add kingmaking top-ups to help the bigger parties achieve compounded council majorities. The bigger players lured many of the micro parties into local coalitions since they were focused on community or personal leadership interests, which could be served irrespective of ideology.

The local manifestations of these patterns are dissected in the case studies making up the *Barometer* research project.

The variables monitored and the trends emerging from the Barometer research project

The *Barometer* research fathoms how local developments in the coalition municipalities impacted on coalition formation, governance and service delivery.

The research was guided by selected variables which revealed trends such as (to be read in conjunction with p. 1):

- The socio-economic foundations of local government, including coalition local government in South Africa: The socio-economic and developmental settings of local government, and the severe accompanying stresses of financial management and service delivery, undergird the assessment of local coalition government in South Africa. Most municipalities in the country operate in conditions of substantial citizen dependence on the state, with many residents unable to pay for services. Local coalition governments are much like their non-coalition counterparts – deficient capacity and poor performance is a *local government problem*, not just a local coalition government shortcoming. The coalition municipalities vary widely in the incomes they generate and the services they render.
- Coalition agreements and the coalitions that emerge: The *Barometer* research explores the nature (including level of formalisation, if at all) of the coalition agreements. In most instances the agreements are informal and constituted through the allocation of positions and portfolios (see summary further down in this section). The fluid coalition agreements mean that the municipal councils, as institutions of predictable order and organisation, often morph into sites of turmoil. Service delivery is often compromised by coalition council parties being fixated on attaining political power.
- Fluidity in party-political coalition configurations: Few political parties, big or small, do *not* stand a chance of becoming part of a local coalition government. Fleeting council voting alliances are commonplace. Parties enter and exit coalitions (both formal and fleeting) at virtually any point,

- largely without incurring liability or exercising accountability to constituencies. Many micro parties and their bigger counterparts fluctuate between coalition blocs.
- Actions taken by coalition members against their own coalitions: Given the combination of fluidity and the informal coalition agreement style, coalition members on occasion move flagrantly against their own coalitions. For example, parties in a coalition may abstain from voting supportively, and instead launch surprise assaults against their own coalition. This happened, for example, in Johannesburg when the EFF abstained from voting so as to get the DA-led coalition into power, and then did the same in 2022 to take the DA out of power. It also occurred in Ekurhuleni where the EFF alternated between the ANC and the DA. This epitomises the phenomenon of ‘coalitions without commitment’ and is part of the motions-of-no-confidence repertoire.
 - Effects of by-elections on coalitions: By-elections may have an impact on the balance of power and, in a few cases, on the status of incumbent coalitions, bringing in either an altered coalition or at times helping a party into an outright council majority. By-elections in coalition councils are hotly contested, as are by-elections in councils that may be plunged into coalition status. In several cases, by-elections were triggered by assassinations; in other cases, by coalition-crossing by ward-based councillors – some of whom then won the ward for the new party that the councillor came to associate with.
 - No-confidence motions to uproot incumbent coalitions: Motions of no-confidence are used largely to support parties’ power pursuits, under the veil of poor performance charges levelled at incumbents. No-confidence motions become an instrument not to rectify deficits in governance, but to take power. Many changes in coalitions and the reconstitution of the municipal councils follow. In several cases, provincial governments are seen to be complicit in leveraging the motions, acting in the interests of their parties in the local sphere.
 - The type of municipal executive system in place: The bulk of the coalition municipalities have the executive mayoral system, with a sprinkling – in KwaZulu-Natal, in particular – following the collective proportional system.¹ The latter is the more stable option, but the former gives the mayor the power to make appointments to the mayoral executive committee – a convenient resource in local coalition-building. Legislation allows both. A small number of coalition councils are possibly transitioning to the latter, but these processes are affected by suspicions of party-political motivations.
 - The administration status of the coalition municipality: In the modest number of cases where councils are under administration (in terms of, for example, Section 139 or 154 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa), there is limited evidence of this having an impact. Notwithstanding this, there are many additional cases where interventions would be justified, provided they are effective. Provincial governments appear to have a limited appetite for this form of involvement – they are either sceptical of the responsibilities they will incur or mindful of the known limited impact.
 - Municipal financial management: Legislation,² and the Municipal Finance Management Act 2003, in particular, requires municipalities to develop and share documents and reports, such as the Integrated Development Plan (IDP), the municipal budget, the Service Delivery and Budget Implementation Plan (SDBIP), and Section 52 of the quarterly reports and Section 72 of the mid-year finance and performance management reports. The coalition municipalities reveal a high level of compliance, but also many gaps. The research shows that the existence of these documents is no guarantee that stable, developmental local governance is being effected.
 - The use of the coalition council budget, and service delivery levels: This set of indicators reveals the dilemma of limited resources and the frequent inability of municipalities, including coalition councils, to repay debt that is owing to bulk service providers like Eskom and the water boards. Many of the coalition councils suffering financial distress focus their limited resources on immediate necessities rather than on maintenance of infrastructure or investment in new (and essential) infrastructure.
 - The Auditor-General’s (AG) 2021–2022 audit reports:³ The 2021–2022 audit reports provide the first findings that apply to the post-LGE2021 administrations, albeit only for the last six months of the financial year in question. The audit findings saw some coalition municipalities improving and others

regressing, while many delivered the same outcomes as they had in the previous year – like their non-coalition counterparts. The major issues that the AG highlighted regarding municipalities that had regressed in their performance were their high vacancy rates, high staff turnover rates and poverty of expertise. This resulted in the hiring of consultants who in turn were not properly monitored due to this lack of internal expertise. The absence of consequence management was another challenge, where corruption, fraud, and unnecessary and fruitless expenditure went unpunished. The AG’s reports carried pleas for provincial governments to maintain close contact with municipalities to ensure that these challenges are resolved.

Coalition types and party associations emerging from local government practice

The *Barometer* research identifies a range of typical coalition party associations and coalition formation practices that have emerged in the local sphere since LGE2021. These have coalesced into identifiable coalition types, albeit embryonic in this relatively early phase of coalition politics in South Africa. South Africa has seen coalitions in earlier post-1994 times, but their motivation and character have been different. For example, the earlier coalitions were often aimed at reconciliation and social cohesion. In the current conjuncture, they are frequently concerned with efforts to gain or retain political power.

Variable associations between political parties undergird the current coalition types. The associations are determined by, inter alia, ideological affinity, the opportunity to be in power (or simply to hold a municipal portfolio chair), an aversion to another party (and a coalition’s ability to keep that party out of power), a genuine desire to represent community interests, and strategic considerations regarding how current manoeuvres will impact future election prospects at the national and provincial levels.

The precise configurations of these coalitions are fluid, characterised by flexibility and opportunism. Coalition-crossing is the order of the day. The realignment of one party across the ‘divide’ between the ANC and DA, or the DA and EFF, can be driven by anger and frustrated ambitions in the previous coalition, rather than by principles, policy or ideological considerations. These fluid practices notwithstanding, South Africa’s local coalitions show that there are typical patterns of party coalition associations that prevail along the two ANC and DA axes (Table 1).

Table 1: Typical party associations emerging in hung councils, 2021–2023		
	ANC-driven coalitions	DA-driven coalitions
These are typical voting blocs or coalitions. However, there are few rules that bind the partners; even the two bloc leaders have coalesced.	ANC, PA	DA, FF+
At particular times and specific municipal sites, several parties have crossed between coalitions, including the EFF, ActionSA, COPE, PAC, ATM, PA, IFP, UDM.	ANC, EFF	DA, IFP
	ANC, EFF, NFP	DA, FF+, IFP, ACDP
Motivations for cooperation vary from ideological affinity to mutual aversion to another party.	ANC, PAC, GOOD, UDM, AIC, ATM, community parties	DA, COPE, ActionSA, UIM, community parties
Source: Susan Booysen for MISTRA, using data from the <i>MISTRA Coalitions Barometer 2021–2023</i>		
Note: The meanings of the various acronyms in this table appear on p. iii of this summary.		

Multiple types of coalitions take shape between these sets of parties, along with many community-specific parties – based on the number of parties and the statuses of the parties in the specific municipality. The types of coalition manifestations in Table 2 do not measure the stability–instability dynamic in coalition politics; instability manifests across a range of types. There is no law that binds coalition partners together, and the typology will continue to evolve. Only a longer period of study will enable a conclusive identification of typologies. The *MISTRA Coalitions Barometer 2021–2023* aims to continue monitoring and enhancing understanding of these dimensions of coalitions politics and governance. In the interim, the details presented in Table 2 are indicative of practices and cultures that are unfolding in coalition politics in South Africa and will possibly also be evident as coalition politics increasingly takes hold at the provincial and national levels.

Table 2: Evolving typology of coalitions at local government level in South Africa, 2021–2023 <i>Organising principle: the number and statuses of parties (majority, opposition, big, small, micro parties)</i>	
Coalition type Owing to complexity of coalition types in the local sphere, the types are not always mutually exclusive. They also vary over time.	Examples of municipalities Owing to coalition changes, many municipalities vary in category over time.
CONSENSUAL DE FACTO COALITIONS	
1. Simple de facto coalition of biggest (plural majority) party in charge (allowed by all parties in council). Opposition parties do not attempt to build a competing majority, recognising their own inability to build a numerically matching coalition. The confidence-and-supply principle is at work. In a few cases, this type arose following unresolved court action.	Nongoma (unresolved court action); uMdoni; Msunduzi; Alfred Duma; Thabazimbi (contested court action); Govan Mbeki; Steve Tshwete; Saldanha Bay; Breede Valley; Langeberg; Cape Agulhas; George; Matzikama; !Kheis
SIMPLE COALITIONS OF TWO-PARTY UNITY WITH ONE FIRM KINGMAKER, ONE BIG PARTY WITH TOP-UP OR TWO	
2. Simple majority coalition, with one big party needing minimal top-up, which it readily secures from a small party (or two), but the additional party top-up is not essential for a majority to be reached. There could be minimal policy convergence between the parties. These coalitions are among the most stable, but the top-up parties have crossed coalitions.	Dr Beyers Naudé; KouKamma; Nala; Moqhaka; Merafong, Rand West City; Lesedi; KwaDukuza; AbaQulusi; uMvoti; uMuziwabantu; Nkosi Langalibalele; Msunduzi; Rustenburg; Lekwa–Teemane; JB Marks; Bitou; Oudtshoorn; Knysna; Kgatelopele; Hantam; Hoogland; Gamagara
3. Coalitions with one kingmaker party of medium size in the particular council, which acts predictably and consistently; or simply two (or three) roughly equal and non-majority parties joining forces and constituting a joint majority.	Nama Khoi; Kareeberg; Siyancuma; eNdumeni
COMPLEX COALITIONS CONSTITUTED THROUGH BIG PARTIES PLUS COMPLEX SUPPORT BLOCS	
4. Several smaller parties form an alliance with the biggest party. The biggest party (e.g., ANC or DA) comes with a support bloc of parties that bring voting majorities. These parties are all necessary to help constitute an outright majority (confidence-and-supply arrangements with a single party or alliance of parties often nurturing the coalition). These coalitions are often associated with instability.	Nelson Mandela Bay; Emfuleni; Mogale City; eThekweni; Ekurhuleni; Johannesburg; Karoo Hoogland; Lesedi; Emfuleni; Merafong City; Maluti-a-Phofung; Prince Albert

<p>5. Two big/relatively big parties unite and constitute an outright majority – such as the DA and IFP, the IFP and EFF, the ANC and EFF, forming comfortable or in some cases oversized coalitions that may also be joined by a bloc of micro-party associates. A variant is the proxy-leadership coalition: a small or micro party is supported by bigger parties (that jointly hold a majority) to ‘lead’ as proxy party when, for example, the two leading parties such as the ANC and EFF agree not to be led by each other.</p>	<p>Lekwa; Maluti-a-Phofung; Maphumulo; Dannhauser; Nongoma; eNdumeni; eDumbe; Metsimaholo; Theewaterskloof; Kannaland; Beaufort West; Laingsburg; Prince Albert; Okhahlamba</p> <p>Variant examples: Johannesburg; Ekurhuleni; Tshwane</p>
<p>6. Multiple small parties join forces with the main opposition (second biggest) party to keep the biggest party (e.g., the ANC) out of power; or in small councils, equal parties unite against the biggest party (which lacks an outright majority). Such parties can be ideologically diverse, e.g., the DA and EFF plus the contingents of micro parties present in metros.</p>	<p>Mogale City; Johannesburg; Ekurhuleni; Lekwa; Cederberg; Nelson Mandela Bay; Kareeberg; Siyancuma; Gamagara; uMhlabuyalingana; uMhlathuze; Thembelihle; !Kheis</p>
<p>7. Grand coalitions, or coalitions of local unity, where ideologically diverse, incongruent parties coalesce and cooperate for diverse motivations but are mostly anchored in unique local dynamics. Some of these coalitions manifest fleetingly in collaborative voting arrangements.</p>	<p>Metsimaholo (until early 2023); Modimolle-Mookgophong (via mayoral election by coin); Witzenberg; Karoo Hoogland</p>
RECIPROCAL COALITIONS - INCORPORATING SOME OF THE ABOVE PRACTICES	
<p>8. Reciprocal coalitions, where two parties agree to give control over one municipality to the one party as the <i>quid pro quo</i> for the second party’s control over the other municipality.</p>	<p>ANC and PA in Hantam and Karoo Hoogland; ANC and SCM attempts re Thembelihle and Siyathemba (the local SCM went against the deal); the EFF and IFP’s failed attempt re uMhlathuze</p>
<p>Notes: (a) The designations of big and small parties differ, depending on the size of the overall council. In the case of councils with a limited number of seats, there will be small differences between big and small parties. (b) Multiple placements are possible due to change over time; many municipalities can occur in more than one category. This table cites the cases that highlight the occurrence of the form of coalition in the municipality – its listings are not exhaustive. (c) Owing to multifaceted manoeuvres, it may be possible for particular coalitions to qualify for more than just one typology placement.</p>	
<p>Source: Susan Booysen for MISTRA, using data from the <i>MISTRA Coalitions Barometer 2021–2023</i>.</p>	

Multiple types of coalitions take shape between these sets of parties, along with many community-specific parties - based on the number of parties and the statuses of the parties in the specific municipality.

Formal coalition agreements are scarce; when they do occur, they prove to be binding only until the next best offer surfaces.

The coalition practices emerging from the summative typology in Table 2 denote the coalition formation cultures that have been taking shape in the local sphere in South Africa – and the extent to which parties have bound themselves to formalised agreements, or not. Formal coalition agreements are scarce; when they do occur, they prove to be binding only until the next best offer surfaces. They tend to be disregarded or substituted at some point before the envisaged end of the agreement. Two such formal or relatively formal agreements stand out: the December 2021 agreement between the DA, ActionSA, FF+, IFP, ACDP and COPE; and the November 2021 ‘Government of local unity’ agreement of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality between the ANC, GOOD, African Independent Congress (AIC), Northern Alliance (NA), PAC, UDM, Defenders of the People (DOP) and African Integrity Movement (AIM).

This typology of coalitions also draws attention to the nature of coalition agreements in the local sphere in South Africa. The main forms that the 2021–2023 coalition agreements take are:

- Formal, multiparty agreement, deliberated and announced (such an agreement may include the specification of portfolio allocations);
- Coalition by simple announcement of municipal portfolio allocations;
- Coalition by voting for offices of mayor, deputy mayor, speaker, chief whip;
- Bloc or pattern voting as evidence of a coalition (it may either be enduring or fleeting) – in some cases, the designation of ‘voting partner’ is preferred over that of ‘coalition partner’;
- Confidence-and-supply arrangement (which may converge with the option directly above);⁴ and
- Coalition by stealth – strategic abstention from voting, absenteeism, absconding from council sittings, walkouts (in some cases, these actions were part of confidence-and-supply agreements; in other cases, they were not).

The rest of this summary presents synopses of evolving coalition praxis across the provinces.

SELECTED TRENDS FROM THE PROVINCES

The trends summarised above are substantiated in the details provided in the *Barometer* project's provincial analysis. For full details, see the *MISTRA Coalitions Barometer 2021–2023* (forthcoming).



Coalitions in Eastern Cape local government

In LGE2016, the Eastern Cape had only one hung municipality – Nelson Mandela Bay. This number trebled in the LGE2021 results when Dr Beyers Naudé, KouKamma and (again) Nelson Mandela Bay could not register outright winners (out of the total of 36 local and two metropolitan municipalities). Following LGE2016, Nelson Mandela Bay had its share of instability, frequently alternating coalition governments and in the process affecting service provision. The 2016–2021 term ended without a mayor in office and the metro was run by what was then termed ‘the black caucus’.

Following LGE2021, instability in Nelson Mandela Bay continued. For the first few months after the elections, the municipality was governed by an ANC-led coalition, which was then replaced with a DA-led coalition. This was enabled by the free-will ‘coalition-crossing’ of several of the micro parties – despite the attempted formal coalition agreement with the ANC. Of the other two 2021 coalitions in the province, Dr Beyers Naudé was governed at first by a DA-led coalition, which changed to an ANC-led coalition with a community party in 2022, while KouKamma has been governed by an ANC-led coalition.

Coalition trends that stood out in this early part of the 2021–2026 term can be differentiated according to whether the ANC and DA had roughly equal council bases (Nelson Mandela Bay and Dr Beyers Naudé) or where the ANC emerged as undeniably the strongest but without an outright majority (KouKamma):

- When the ANC is still the leading party (but without an absolute majority), it will simply need the cooperation of a small top-up party or independent councillor. Such parties are quite readily available and their cooperation with the ANC generally makes for a stable coalition. In the case of KouKamma, an independent councillor filled the slot.
- In the case of Nelson Mandela Bay and Dr Beyers Naudé, the ANC and DA were equal or had a one seat difference between them, respectively. A range of small parties had one or two council seats each. Coalition government changes occurred in both these councils due to coalition-crossing by some of these small or micro parties. In Dr Beyers Naudé, it was simply Compatriots South Africa (CSA) that crossed the coalition floor – moving from

the DA–FF+ to the ANC. In Nelson Mandela Bay, it was the UDM, PAC, AIC and AIM that swapped coalitions – moving from the ANC coalition to the DA-led coalition. This move was notable because the first three of these micro parties are generally part of the ANC’s support bloc and so, in this period of coalition politics, it was quite unusual to find them in a DA-led coalition.

In her 2021–2022 audit report, the AG identified the Eastern Cape as one of the two provinces whose overall outcomes had improved. However, the report also noted that the province’s weak control systems persisted. Twenty-one municipalities received unqualified opinions, an increase of two over the previous fiscal year. However, there was a decrease in the quality of performance, with 15 municipalities not having any findings, compared to 16 the year before. These opinions were scattered between coalition and majority-government councils. The details on the Eastern Cape coalitions revealed that councils can be distracted by coalition spectacles, but also that sound governance can persist in the face of councillors being focused on politics instead of governance. It seems to depend on whether councillors interfere and try to dictate according to party-political considerations.

The AG also noted that the provincial government and treasury had tried to support municipalities with budget reforms, financial recovery plans, and strategies to manage unauthorised, irregular, and fruitless and wasteful expenditure. The impact of these interventions, however, has not been seen because municipalities are slow to implement solutions. Among the AG’s recommendations were to develop capable leadership to enhance transparency and accountability, to prioritise the fundamental needs of communities and to promote socio-economic development. The oversight exercised by the provincial government over municipalities seemed to be inadequate. Moving forward, the province should provide adequate oversight and monitor financial reporting processes throughout the year. In addition, there is a need to strengthen governance structures within municipalities throughout the province, foster a culture of accountability and create an effective system of consequences for wrongdoing (AGSA, 2023).



After LGE2016, the Free State had only one municipality, Metsimaholo, in a coalition government. LGE2021 increased the number to four, with the addition of Moqhaka, Nala and Maluti-a-Phofung. At one time in 2023, the metropolitan Mangaung council also resembled a coalition, following intra-ANC turmoil and some ANC councillors supporting the election of a DA mayor. Subsequently, Mangaung reverted to ANC control. In total, the province has 18 local municipalities, with Mangaung being the only metropolitan municipality.

The increase in the number of hung municipalities in the Free State was partly a consequence of ineffective local governance, which was linked to allegations of fraud and corruption. The allegations on occasion led to the suspension of party members by the ANC, which caused infighting within the party and resulted in the formation of relatively strong community organisations that had the capacity to challenge the ANC’s hegemony. For example, suspended party members formed MAP16 in Maluti-a-Phofung. The former ANC members contested for councillorship under the MAP16 banner in LGE2021, which won 20 seats – 19 of them evidently wrested from the ANC, which saw its LGE2016 seat share drop by the same number (MISTRA, 2021b). This substitution was not effective either; turmoil and poor governance led to calls for the municipality to be placed under administration.

Three types of coalitions emerged from the four Free State councils – minimal coalitions, complex anti-ANC party compounds, and a semi-government of unity for at least some of the time in Metsimaholo:

- Again, there were minimal coalitions – in this instance, stable ones – where the ANC as the strongest party needed only minimal top-up and got this from a community party. In the case of Nala, it was from the Nala Community Forum (which contributed two seats to the ANC’s total) and in Moqhaka it was the Power of African Unity (PAU) which topped up the ANC’s total of 22 to 23 for an outright majority.

- In Maluti-a-Phofung, a coalition of seven parties united against the ANC – MAP16 (the split-off from the ANC), EFF, DPSA (Dikwankwetla Party of South Africa), ATM, SARKO (South African Royal Kingdoms Organisation), AULA (All Unemployment Labour Alliance) and AIC, bringing in a total of 34 seats in a 70-seat council, against the ANC's 28. This grouping governed with DA–FF+ support for some of the time. Instability and malgovernance abounded, despite relative coalition stability.
- Metsimaholo was another council in which coalition government arrangements transcended ideology, in part and on occasion. There was a type of grand coalition in which the EFF, ANC and DA cooperated, again to some extent. The three main parties – ANC (16 seats), EFF (12 seats) and DA (12 seats) – were roughly tied. At first there was a DA mayor (after the EFF refused) and ANC speaker; by 2023, as the ANC started consolidating its 2024 election approach, the DA mayor was replaced with an AIC mayor.

Almost all 19 municipalities in the province owe millions of rands to Eskom. All the municipalities that fell under coalition governance after LGE2021 had a record of poor financial and performance management, as evidenced by the AG's findings over the years. In addition, according to the AG's 2021–2022 report, for the sixth consecutive year none of the municipalities in the province obtained a clean audit, even though two municipalities – including Moghaka (a coalition municipality) – improved. In the 2021–2022 report, however, the AG also acknowledged that most of the recommendations that had been given in the previous year to the provincial government and local municipalities in the Free State were in the process of being implemented.



Coalitions in Gauteng local government

Following LGE2016, Gauteng had four hung municipalities – the City of Tshwane, Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni and Mogale City. In LGE2021, the number doubled to eight. The eight comprised the previous four hung municipalities, plus Merafong City, Rand West City, Emfuleni and Lesedi. Out of nine local municipalities in the province, Midvaal Local Municipality, won by the DA both in 2016 and 2021, was the province's only non-coalition municipality. The increase to eight coalition municipalities, combined with a marginal ANC provincial victory in 2019, contributed to expectations that Gauteng may face a provincial coalition government in 2024.

Local government coalition politics in Gauteng is dominated by the hyper instability of the three major metropolitan municipalities of Tshwane, Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni. All three metros have alternated between ANC-dominated and DA-dominated governing coalitions. Mayors, speakers and municipal managers have changed more often than is conducive to focused governance. The metro sites experienced multiple coalition configurations in the period of the *Barometer* monitoring project. These included formal coalitions, coalition minority governments, coalition agreements combined with confidence-and-supply elements, ad hoc bartering of executive positions for political support, vacillation and coalition-crossing by parties such as the EFF, ActionSA and the PA, and coalition fronting. They were also characterised by the application of full arsenals of coalition 'weapons', such as serial motions of no-confidence. Several mayors were proxy mayors from inconsequential micro parties that sustained the major parties, and in particular the ANC, in municipal power, while covering up unresolved aspects of the ANC–EFF coalition agreement.

The following trends emerged in relation to local government coalitions in Gauteng:

- Several stable top-up coalitions took shape, in which the ANC acquired outright majorities with the help of a minor community party and/or a very small established party: These occurred in Merafong (the AIC and the Merafong Agents of Change, MAOC), Rand West City (the PA and Randfontein People's Party, RPP) and Lesedi (the Socialist Economic Freedom Movement, SEFM). This is similar to the ANC's Emfuleni coalition with one small party (PA) and three community parties (Vaal Alternative Alliance Lekgotla, VAAL; Community Solidarity Association, CoSA; New Horizon Movement, NHM).

- Both of Mogale City's alternating coalitions comprised established parties, big and small. First, the DA's coalition at this site comprised two of its usual coalition partners, the FF+ and ACDP, plus a coalition-crosser, the ATM. The latter was typically closer to the ANC, but in this instance, it started off in the DA coalition before heading back to the ANC in 2023. To an extent this was also true of the EFF which had originally helped the DA coalition into power in 2021 through a de facto confidence-and-supply agreement but switched back in 2023 when the ANC–EFF agreement to cooperate to remove the DA from power came into play.
- Ekurhuleni, Johannesburg and Tshwane all experienced changing coalition orders, although they always centred on either the ANC or the DA. In both Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni, the movement was from the immediate post-LGE2021 pattern of a concerted front formation against the ANC, even by some parties that can be seen as originating in the ANC camp. This was largely in response to what was interpreted to be the expressed electoral mandate that the ANC was no longer wanted in power. Over time, this interpretation softened, and by 2023 it could virtually be guaranteed that the EFF, ATM, COPE and the UDM, along with GOOD and the PAC, would be in (or back in) the ANC camp.

Another common trend among the Gauteng coalition municipalities is their indebtedness to Eskom and Rand Water. In April 2023, Rand Water announced that it was owed about R4.5 billion by municipalities, and four coalition municipalities from Gauteng were among the top five debtors. The Gauteng municipalities' collective debt to Eskom constituted a substantial part of the R62.2 billion that South Africa's municipalities owed to the electricity provider by 2023. This debt was also rising rapidly.

Apart from Midvaal, which achieved nine consecutive clean audits, and Ekurhuleni, whose 2021–2022 outcome was its third consecutive clean audit, the rest of the municipalities in the province struggled with their financial management systems. The AG observed in her 2021–2022 report that even though the right tone had been set by the provincial leadership to restore clean governance in Gauteng, it was not yet yielding the desired results. Gauteng provincial government was, however, implementing commitments, including practical solutions to improve audit outcomes and governance.



Coalitions in KwaZulu-Natal local government

KwaZulu-Natal has one metropolitan municipality and 43 local municipalities. From LGE2016 to LGE2021, the number of municipal coalition governments trebled from seven to 21. These changes followed the reversal of the ANC's growth trajectory from 2009 until the 2019 elections (which revealed that the party was losing support in the province), the apparent re-emergence of the IFP, the EFF's establishment of provincial footholds, and the NFP, once promoted as a party substitute for the IFP, on a path of steep decline.

The province is known for political instability and many violent contests. Both in 2022 and 2023, and in the previous municipal term, targets of politically motivated killings included municipal councillors, political party officials and, in a few cases, senior municipal officials. The LGE2021 took place in the aftermath of the political unrest of July 2021. These uprisings unfolded in a range of municipalities in KwaZulu-Natal that had already hosted or were soon to host coalition local governments. The damage caused by the unrest, combined with the floods in the province in 2022 and 2023, placed a heavy additional burden on many of the municipal administrations.

The KwaZulu-Natal coalition situation is one of hyper-instability which occurs at different levels. The first two trends discussed below relate to a national-level party realignment: first, the EFF's agreement with the ANC to decouple from the IFP, thereby also ending support for the DA in local government, and jointly with the ANC to push mayors from minor parties in the ANC–EFF support bloc into mayoral positions; second, at the provincial

level but important in terms of its impact, the NFP's movement into open cooperation with the ANC. Amid these movements, the following trends were discernible:

- The EFF's decision in early 2023 to realign back to the ANC for a period following the LGE2021, when it had formed local municipal coalitions with the IFP, affected multiple municipal coalitions. The ANC–EFF mustered new outright majorities in only a handful of the province's municipalities (such as Maphumulo in March 2023). In several others, it took over on the basis that the two parties jointly formed an undisputed majority bloc, despite not achieving a joint outright majority. In June 2023, a vote of no-confidence moved Dannhauser from an EFF–IFP coalition over to the ANC–EFF, supported by the coalition-crosser, one-councillor Community Freedom Party (CFP). In some instances, the IFP with some other minor partners (e.g., several parties with one councillor per party) continued in government, despite new minority statuses.
- The fluid alignment preferences of the NFP fuelled coalition instability. While declining in stature, it remained powerful in several municipalities. In 2023, it decided to realign to the ANC instead of continuing on its more open-ended, post-LGE2021 coalition track. At several municipal sites, its councillors were divided as to whether to follow the party instruction to go with the ANC, or with the IFP. Nongoma is a prime example of a 2023 takeover by the ANC–EFF–NFP. However, the IFP coalition was reinstated through a ruling by the Pietermaritzburg High Court. Given the NFP positions, some KwaZulu-Natal coalition councils were in limbo. Change was probably pending, but they were still ruled by coalitions that paired the NFP with the DA and IFP, such as in eMadlangeni.
- The multitude of small and especially one-seater micro parties that gained representation in councils – eThekweni is an extreme example – added to the instability of governing coalitions. Coalition municipalities where these parties operated often scrambled for 50 per cent plus 1, such as in uMhlathuze and Newcastle after the EFF's withdrawal. In KwaDukuza, the ANC took minimal top-up from the AIC; in Okhahlamba, the ANC, NFP and African People's Movement (APEMO) built a coalition majority.
- As in other provinces where the IFP was (and still is) relatively strong (Gauteng), the DA–IFP coalitions were generally stable, such as in the municipality of eNdameni.
- The ANC and DA, and in a few cases also the IFP, came with their contingents of micro parties, constituting loyal kingmaking party blocs. In uMuziwabantu, the ANC received a two-seat top-up from Al Jama-ah. In AbaQulusi, the IFP remained the dominant party following the EFF's withdrawal, but it could count on the DA to provide a top-up. In Mthonjaneni, the EFF pulled out and the IFP needed minimal top-up, but the IFP won a seat from the ANC in a by-election and established an outright majority. The IFP in councils like Nkosi Langalibalele needed minimal top-up but was left to form minority governments, albeit in the context that the DA supported it on a confidence-and-supply basis. In the case of uMvoti, the Abantu Batho Congress (ABC) abandoned its coalition with the IFP and instead also aligned with the ANC to form the new governing coalition.
- There are several municipalities in KwaZulu-Natal where one party was significantly bigger than the rest, albeit without an absolute majority, and was simply left to get on with the job of governing, knowing that it would find top-up support to get budgets adopted. uMdoni and Msunduzi are examples of municipalities in which the ANC was left to get on with governing. Similarly, an IFP minority government governed in Alfred Duma.

According to the AG, some improvements were noted in municipalities in KwaZulu-Natal in terms of audit outcomes. The *Barometer* research shows that of the current contingent of coalition governments, for the 2021–2022 financial year there were 14 cases of unqualified with findings, six cases of qualified with findings and one case of disclaimed status. Overall, eight municipalities in the province improved their audit outcomes, while four regressed. In her report covering the 2020–2021 period, the AG found that 89 per cent of KwaZulu-Natal municipalities struggled to implement proper controls over supply chain management processes (AGSA, 2022). The situation persisted beyond LGE2021, affecting municipalities with both coalition and majority-government statuses. The 2021–2022 audit outcomes for the province highlighted the need to strengthen internal controls and monitoring to ensure that reliable, credible and consistent reporting of financial and performance information is maintained. Furthermore, there is an urgent need to strengthen compliance with legislation, the employment of competent personnel and decisive action in addressing wrongdoing (AGSA, 2023).



Coalitions in Limpopo local government

Both of the Limpopo local municipalities that were run by coalition governments after LGE2016 – Modimolle-Mookgophong and Thabazimbi – found themselves hung once more following LGE2021. The province has a total of 22 local municipalities. The two coalition municipalities cover substantial geographical areas, with a combined average of about 11,000 square kilometres and each sustaining an average of 100,000 inhabitants. The two municipalities are also located within the same district municipality.

After both the 2016 and 2021 elections, Thabazimbi and Modimolle-Mookgophong had coalitions that were DA-led, although there were no formal agreements between the parties. In the case of Modimolle-Mookgophong, the election of the mayor after LGE2021 remained deadlocked and the stalemate had to be broken by tossing a coin, as provided for in terms of legislation governing deadlocks of such a nature. The DA received the mayoral chain on that basis. This lasted until 2023, when the DA mayor succumbed to a terminal illness and an ANC councillor was elected mayor by majority vote. In Thabazimbi, the ANC regained the council in 2023 on a tenuous ‘biggest-party-majority’ label, following a controversial motion of no-confidence that was upheld in the Polokwane High Court. While these developments did not signal a recovery of the ANC at these municipalities, the ANC nevertheless regained control.

The trends emerging from these two Limpopo coalition cases were:

- The serendipitous majority that the DA enjoyed due to the EFF’s rebellion against the ANC would obviously not last when the EFF turned to cooperation with the ANC in 2023. This applied to both Modimolle-Mookgophong and Thabazimbi. ‘The luck of the draw’ leveraged the DA into the mayoral position, while also veiling the extent to which it was the power of the EFF that had enabled its mayorship.
- In Thabazimbi, the two community parties, the Thabazimbi Residents Association (TRA) and the Thabazimbi Forum for Service Delivery (TFSD), together enjoyed a seat status as big as that of the DA, demonstrating the influence that these parties may have beyond being one-seater, convenient top-ups for the main parties.
- Limpopo local government coalition practice, especially in Thabazimbi, illustrates typical ways in which votes of no-confidence have come to be (ab)used. When this happens, municipal proceedings almost inevitably revert to court processes to try and run the municipalities.

According to the AG’s observations, Limpopo is characterised by inadequate financial management discipline and an overall lack of oversight, which led to audits for the 2021–2022 financial year remaining extremely poor, as was the case in the previous year. Both case studies in the province, Modimolle-Mookgophong and Thabazimbi, earned qualified with findings opinions for the 2021–2022 financial year. The AG’s report showed that the province spent over R1.13 billion on financial reporting, including R875 million on salaries for finance officials and R263 million on payments to financial reporting consultants. In general, the municipalities rely on consultants, mainly due to the lack of skilled staff who can prepare their financial statements. However, these consultants are either not given adequate records to work with and/or work too independently and are not scrutinised by the municipality due to a lack of skilled personnel. As a result, only four municipalities in the province were able to submit credible financial statements to the AG, and the two coalition councils were not among them (AGSA, 2023).



Coalitions in Mpumalanga local government

Mpumalanga is one of the provinces in which there had been no municipal coalition government prior to 2021. Following the LGE2021, three municipalities were hung: Steve Tshwete, Govan Mbeki and Lekwa. In all three the ANC had previously – post-LGE2016 – been the majority government. In choosing the leadership in these municipalities after LGE2021, some parties abstained from voting, which enabled the ANC to maintain its leadership as a minority government at some of the municipalities. The province is divided into 17 local municipalities. The local government coalition situation in Mpumalanga sheds light on how intra-party factionalism, bureaucratic battles and municipal resources that fall far short of public expenditure needs, spill over into municipal governance and affect stability – even if the council coalitions are stable.

The three coalition cases of Mpumalanga – Lekwa, Steve Tshwete and Govan Mbeki local municipalities – had diverse party-political coalition configurations:

- In both Steve Tshwete and Govan Mbeki, the DA abstained and let the bigger-but-without-an-outright-majority ANC get on with the task of governance.
- Lekwa had the relatively unique situation in which the Lekwa Community Forum (LCF) led an anti-ANC coalition which remained stable during the period of monitoring. However, the municipality's dismal financial governance situation, which predated LGE2021, did not abate. The municipality was under ongoing administration.
- Steve Tshwete showed evidence of sound municipal financial management, but governance still did not proceed smoothly.

During the early stages of research for this report, politics in Mpumalanga was generally unstable, mainly impacted by internal ANC turmoil. The resultant disorder affected municipal politics, both in hung municipalities and where the ANC was maintaining its majority rule.

In her 2021–2022 consolidated report, the AG highlighted that Mpumalanga province is characterised by an environment of weak controls and a lack of leadership accountability. The province produced stagnant audit findings in the sense that three improvements were matched by three regressions, and shortcomings in service delivery continued to increase. The three coalition municipalities had diverse auditing outcomes for the core period covered in this monitoring project (the financial year 2021–2022), ranging from Lekwa with disclaimed findings, to Steve Tshwete with unqualified with findings (after two successive years of unqualified without findings) and Govan Mbeki with qualified with findings.

The AG alluded to the fact that 90 per cent of the municipalities in the province were still struggling with basic financial disciplines. Meanwhile, communities' social and economic demands were rapidly evolving. The province seems to have tried to assist some municipalities with financial management capabilities. However, this appears not to have been enough as only two municipalities in the entire province produced credible financial and performance reports – including coalition municipality, Steve Tshwete (unqualified without findings) (AGSA, 2023).



Coalitions in Northern Cape local government

The Northern Cape had 10 hung municipalities in the aftermath of LGE2021, compared to three after LGE2016. In total, there are 26 local municipalities in the province. Of the three municipalities that were hung post-LGE2016, Nama Khoi and Kgatelopele found themselves hung yet again, adding to the eight municipalities that were hung for the first time. The eight were Hantam, Karoo Hoogland, Kareeberg, !Kheis, Siyathemba, Thembelihle, Siyancuma and Gamagara. Ubuntu, previously hung, now emerged with an outright majority government, controlled by the ANC with 61.75 per cent of the vote.

Several coalition anomalies occurred in the province. In the municipality of Kai !Garib, the ANC received only 44.82 per cent of the vote but 10 out of the 19 seats – meaning that coalition status was avoided. This contrasted with Siyancuma municipality where the ANC achieved 52.12 per cent of the total vote but could not gain enough seats to ensure an absolute majority in terms of seats.

In most of the Northern Cape coalition municipalities the ANC remained the biggest of the political parties, despite ceding several previous outright majorities. In only four of the 10 coalition municipalities, the ANC would not become part of the coalition government. These four were cases where community parties or independents emerged to play a central role, in association with the DA and EFF:

- Kareeberg: the DA, Kareeberg Civic Movement (KCM) and EFF formed a coalition.
- Thembelihle: the EFF and Siyathemba Community Movement (SCM) formed a controversial reciprocal coalition – Thembelihle was supposed to have been the ANC's prize in its municipality trade-off agreement with the SCM (an agreement disregarded by the local SCM). In terms of the SCM–ANC agreement, the SCM would take Siyathemba and the ANC Thembelihle.
- Nama Khoi: the Nama Khoi Community Movement (NCM) went into a coalition with the DA.
- Siyancuma: the DA and FF+ went into a coalition with two independents.

A series of Northern Cape trends stood out:

- The ANC's partner of choice was the PA – a convenient contributor of a small number of seats, all that the ANC needed to reach the 50 per cent majority threshold for a minimal coalition. These coalitions also brought some demographic diversity to the ANC's coalition configurations. The ANC–PA coalitions took shape in Kgatelopele, Hantam and Karoo Hoogland, the latter only for a while.
- The ANC was amenable to reciprocal trading of entire municipalities, such as in the Siyathemba and Karoo Hoogland deals. For Hantam and Karoo Hoogland, the ANC and PA reached a reciprocal agreement involving the ANC taking Hantam and the PA taking Hoogland. The ANC obtained Hantam and the PA obtained Hoogland, but the latter deal was of short duration – the ANC supported the DA in ousting the PA in Hoogland.
- Community parties played central roles in several of the coalitions – Kareeberg, Thembelihle, Siyathemba and Nama Khoi. These parties mostly went into coalitions with the DA, although in Gamagara the Gamagara Community Forum (GCF) was first in a coalition with the ANC, which was later followed by a deal with the DA. In Siyancuma, two independents went into coalitions with the DA and FF+.
- Coalitions between various opposition parties also featured, such as the DA and COPE forming a coalition in !Kheis; the DA and EFF along with the KCM forming a coalition in Kareeberg; and the DA and FF+ along with independents forming a coalition in Siyancuma.

According to the AG, in the 2021–2022 submissions, the Northern Cape had the highest number of municipalities that failed to submit their performance reports. This meant that most of the municipalities in the province short-

changed residents due to their lack of transparency and refusal to be held accountable (AGSA, 2023). Also, only four out of the 31 municipalities in the province managed to achieve clean audit outcomes, and the coalition municipalities were not among them. Another four received disclaimed opinions (Kgatelopele and !Kheis were two of the four), with audits of two municipalities outstanding because they submitted their financial statements late and their audits were still in progress when the AG report was produced. On the positive side, a total of 26 municipalities (84 per cent) submitted their financial statements for auditing by the legislated date, which was an improvement from 20 municipalities (65 per cent) in the previous year. Of the municipalities in coalitions in the province, only Gamagara improved its audit outcome from qualified to unqualified with findings. Kareeberg and Hoogland were already at this level in consecutive years.

The AG expressed concern about the performance of most municipalities, as people are negatively affected by municipalities' inability to properly manage the resources under their control. All stakeholders, more so the municipalities and provincial government, should 'thoroughly and honestly reflect on the initiatives implemented, as well as the effort they have put in to improve the current state of municipalities' (AGSA, 2023).



Coalitions in North West local government

Following LGE2016, there was only one local coalition government in the province. This trebled to three following LGE2021. North West province hosts 18 local municipalities.

Rustenburg was the first and only North West municipality to be in a coalition government, from 2016 to 2021. In that election the ANC won only 43 seats out of a total of 89. In LGE2021, the municipality again could not deliver an outright winner, and JB Marks and Lekwa–Teemane joined the coalition ranks. In all three of these coalition municipalities, the ANC's 2021 results had come close to outright council majorities: in Lekwa–Teemane it won seven out of 14 seats, in JB Marks it won 33 out of 67 seats, and in Rustenburg it won 43 out of 90 seats. Through informal agreements with small parties and community organisations, the ANC retained its leadership of all three municipalities.

It therefore formed minimal coalitions – choosing small 'top-up' coalition partners that welcomed the elevation that came with inclusion in a governing coalition. The predominant trends for coalition formation in North West were:

- The ANC was in relatively stable coalitions with small and micro-opposition parties from its support bloc. In JB Marks, it was the regularly co-opted PA that contributed two seats to the coalition with the ANC, while in Rustenburg it was another regular ANC coalition partner, the AIC, that helped the ANC back into power. Informal agreements drove these coalitions.
- The ANC was in stable coalition formations with community parties. In Lekwa–Teemane, the ANC's coalition partner of choice was the Forum 4 Service Delivery (F4SD, contributing one seat to the coalition), while in Rustenburg another local civic organisation, Arona, added one seat to the ANC's tally (besides the contribution that came from the AIC).

In the North West, no municipality had obtained a clean audit for the past decade. In the 2021–2022 financial year, only three municipalities managed to secure an unqualified with findings opinion. The rest, including the three coalition municipalities, obtained qualified or disclaimed opinions. In May 2023, the province's MEC for Cooperative Governance, Human Settlements and Traditional Affairs argued that the poor performance of municipalities and limited expenditure on infrastructure grants, both of which were extremely prevalent in the North West, were mostly attributable to the lack of managers in critical positions in municipalities, rather than the dynamics and contests of political parties. All 18 North West municipalities managed to submit financial statements in their first year of administration post-LGE2021, an improvement from the 10 that had been submitted the previous year (AGSA, 2023).



Coalitions in Western Cape local government

The Western Cape has one metropolitan municipality and 24 local municipalities. Of these, 16 emerged as coalition municipalities following LGE2021, compared with the eight hung municipalities post-LGE2016. The Western Cape is the only province in South Africa in which most municipalities are under exclusive or coalition-led DA governance. The increase in the number of coalition municipalities in the province nevertheless indicates countertendencies to DA predominance.

Of the eight municipalities that were hung post-LGE2016 – Witzenberg, Laingsburg, Beaufort West, Prince Albert, Kannaland, Hessequa, Knysna and Bitou – only Hessequa shook off the coalition status in LGE2021 when the DA gained an outright majority. It was a narrow victory of 50.62 per cent but gave the party the required nine seats to control the council. The municipalities of Cederberg, George, Oudtshoorn, Cape Agulhas, Theewaterskloof, Langeberg, Breede Valley, Saldanha Bay and Matzikama joined the coalition ranks in 2021. Prince Albert municipality shook off its coalition status in September 2022 when the DA won a by-election and gained an outright majority.

A spectrum of coalition types, coalition formations and reversals, and power changes as coalition partners reconsider and grab better offers, all help to characterise the Western Cape's distinctive coalitions imprint. The following were among the key coalition trends emerging in the Western Cape:

- The DA assumed coalition power and stayed the course (roughly the first two years following LGE2021), with the same coalition partner(s), or at least some of the original partner(s), in Saldanha Bay, Breede Valley, Langeberg, Cape Agulhas, George and Matzikama (the latter after the PA councillors joined the DA and the DA made gains via a by-election). The stable coalitions tended to be at those municipalities where the DA and FF+ could jointly constitute either an outright majority or a persuasive minority (one that a coalition of alternative parties was unable to match).
- The DA aligned with a range of coalition partners comprising small conventional parties and community parties – DA, Active United Front (AUF) and Plett Democratic Congress (PDC) in Bitou; DA, Knysna Independent Movement (KIM) and PA in round one in Knysna; DA, Saamstaan and FF+ in round two in Oudtshoorn; DA, Cederberg First Residents Association (CFRA) and FF+ in round three in Cederberg – with 'rounds' designating first, second and third post-LGE2021 coalitions at any particular municipality.
- The ANC and small parties in its usual support bloc pulled together an outright majority – such as the PA, GOOD in coalition with the ANC in Theewaterskloof; ANC with the PA and EFF in round two in Knysna; ANC with the PA, Saamstaan, Oudtshoorn Gemeenskap Inisiatief (OGI) and Independent Civic Organisation of South Africa (Icosa) in round one in Oudtshoorn; ANC, Karoo Gemeenskap Party (KGP) and PA in round one in Prince Albert; and ANC and PA in round two in Cederberg.
- The ANC, typical small support-bloc parties of the ANC and one or more community parties constituted two- or three-party coalitions – Laingsburg (ANC, PA and Karoo Democratic Force, KDF), Beaufort West (ANC, PA and KDF, where a majority coalition took shape) and Kannaland (ANC, Icosa and Kannaland Independent Party, KIP) – a complex coalition due to personal dynamics, with the coalition also taking shape via court cases).
- A semi-grand coalition was attempted at one time in Witzenberg just after LGE2021 when the DA, GOOD and the ANC attempted a coalition (yet later in the period of monitoring, coalition politics in this council descended into a chaotic mix of manoeuvring and parallel government).

The Western Cape is the province with the largest number of municipalities that have consistently achieved clean audits in the past decade. Of the 16 that embarked on coalition governance in LGE2021, eight achieved clean audits in the 2021–2022 financial year, while another five received an unqualified with findings opinion. Only one obtained a qualified with findings opinion, with the last two opinions being adverse; there was also a disclaimed finding. The coalition municipalities in the five categories in the 2021–2022 financial year were:

- Unqualified without findings: Prince Albert, George, Cape Agulhas, Langeberg, Breede Valley, Theewaterskloof, Witzenberg, Saldanha Bay
- Unqualified with findings: Oudtshoorn, Knysna, Bitou, Cederberg, Matzikama
- Qualified with findings: Beaufort West
- Adverse: Laingsburg
- Disclaimed: Kannaland

In most cases, the AG’s overall view was that municipalities in the Western Cape are doing well when it comes to the key controls of financial performance, leadership and governance (AGSA, 2023).

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Notes

- In the mayoral executive system, the council elects an executive mayor from its ranks. The mayor appoints a mayoral committee from the ranks of the municipal councillors, using their own discretion as to the party-independent composition, since the mayoral committee need not to be constituted to be proportionally in line with the party-independent composition of council. In the collective executive system, the council elects an executive committee from among its councillors. The committee is composed proportionately in line with the council composition. The municipal council then also elects a member from this committee to serve as the mayor.
- Key laws that undergird this summary of the *MISTRA Coalitions Barometer* include:
 - Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998
 - Municipal Finance Management Act 2003
 - Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000
 - Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act 56 of 2003
 - Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act 15 of 2005, along with the
 - Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 106 of 1996
- As a summary, the following are core concepts explaining possible audit opinions (see <https://www.diligent.com/resources/blog/understanding-four-types-audit-reports/>):
 - 'clean audit' defined by the Auditor-General South Africa as financial statements that are free from misstatements (in other words, a financially unqualified audit) and there are no material findings on reporting on performance objectives or non-compliance with legislation.
 - 'unqualified audit' defined by the Auditor-General South Africa as financial statements which do not contain material misstatements. In terms of these financial statements, the Auditor-General raises findings on either reporting on predetermined objectives or non-compliance with legislation or both. Qualified audits are second best to clean audits.
 - 'qualified audit' defined by the Auditor-General South Africa as financial statements which contain material misstatements in specific amounts, or there is insufficient evidence for the Auditor-General to conclude that specific amounts included in the financial statements are not materially misstated.
 - 'adverse audit' defined by the Auditor-General South Africa as financial statements that contain material misstatements that are not confined to specific amounts, or the misstatements represent a substantial portion of the financial statements.
 - 'disclaimed audit' refers to the worst possible audit outcome and is issued in circumstances in which municipalities provided insufficient evidence in the form of documentation on which an audit opinion can be substantiated.
- This is with reference to a party or another entity represented in council agreeing to support the government in motions of confidence and in appropriation or budget votes (supply); they would either vote in favour of a motion or abstain. It also denotes an opposition party agreeing that it will not vote against a minority government (MISTRA, 2021a).

