

DELIVERED: FREE AND FAIR 2021 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

South Africa's sixth democratic municipal elections have been hostage to fate since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the Electoral Commission persevered to make the elections a reality, delivering a milestone free and fair election to citizens.

South Africa's sixth democratic municipal elections were held on Monday, 1 November 2021, and the results were announced three days later, Thursday, 4 November 2021.

"The 2021 Municipal Elections tested us, as a nation, in many ways. The Electoral Commission, political parties, independent candidates, and voters were all faced with a number of challenges. These included the COVID-19 pandemic, truncated time frames, bad weather and power interruptions, and logistical glitches," observed Electoral Commission Chairperson Glen Mashinini at the results announcement.

Despite these challenges, the elections management body achieved its objective of taking its electoral system to the next level of automation through the introduction of a voter management device, which has put paid to the possibility that there could ever be allegations of double voting.

"The fact that we are here today, having delivered these elections is an achievement we should all be proud of as a nation. Our thriving, vibrant, and maturing democracy has indeed withstood the test thrown at it. And for that we are indebted and grateful to all our employees, the Inter-Ministerial Committee, state institutions, agencies, including the security cluster, political contestants, and all our social partners," Mashinini said.



Electoral Commission Chief Electoral Officer Sy Mamabolo at the announcement of the 2021 Municipal Elections results on 4 November 2021

His words were echoed by Chief Electoral Officer, Sy Mamabolo, who noted: "It was an election characterised by uncertainties at some points in the journey, and possibilities at others. At times, it was perceived as an election in doubt, for we never were sure about its safe conduct. It is an election that created diametrically opposed and intense sentiments in the political landscape."

"Yet despite this uneven and oblique path, we have experienced a people involving themselves in the act of electoral engagement. An electoral engagement that avails to the citizenry of the country a moment to re-constitute municipal councils. Indeed, a democratic enterprise that

offers an opportunity to participate in a regular election to determine legislative and executive leadership of the various municipalities in the country," said Mamabolo.

Inclusive elections

In keeping with its constitutional commitment of being inclusive, its electoral engagement has a social consciousness and is thus alive to the fact that we have amongst us those who are infirm or with impaired mobility. Hence, South Africans in special circumstances were offered an opportunity to cast special votes, both at their voting stations or in their homes, on 30 and 31 October 2021.



South Africa's 6th democratic municipal elections, held on 1 November 2021

2021 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN NUMBERS

Number of registered voters:	26 204 579
Female registered voters:	14 458 508 (55 %)
Male registered voters:	11 746 071 (45%)
Voter turnout:	12 064 531 (45.87%)
Voting districts (stations):	23 148
Registered parties contesting:	323
Candidates contesting:	95 427
Council seats contested:	10 461
Councils contested:	213
Number of ballots printed:	72 million
Electoral staff serving:	190 000

Special votes served a twin purpose, on the one hand, they enfranchised people in special circumstances, while at the time offering us an opportunity to sharpen the proficiency of our operations ahead of voting day.

Voting day

In this electoral encounter, 12.3 million voters went to the 23 148 voting stations across the country and marked ballots and by so doing expressed their electoral choices. For these voters, the enormity of the act of voting was so pronounced that whatever health risks there may be, that would not deter them from voting. These are compatriots with a deep civic consciousness for in their minds there can never be a risk big enough to dissuade from voting. We thank you for your simple and humble act of voting, your act of voting serves to fortify electoral engagement in our society. ➤



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The views of these voters were solicited in a survey by the Human Sciences Research Council. If our electoral democracy is to be enriched then the views and opinions of the receipt of the electoral service are paramount, bearing in mind that ultimately our electoral enterprise is about the people and their concomitant well-being.

In the Voter Satisfaction Survey, the HSRC interviewed 12 189 randomly sampled voters in 300 voting stations across the country during different time segments throughout the voting day. By acceptable standards, this is a representative sample that enables us to generalize the whole voter population.

Of the sampled voters, 97% found that the voting procedures inside the Electoral Commission's voting stations were easy to understand, while 94% were satisfied with the ballot paper used in the elections. In other words, the identifiers used in the ballot design were clear and not confusing to voters.

The survey further indicates that 96% were satisfied with the secrecy of the ballot, while 93% were satisfied with the safety and security at the voting station and 84% expressed confidence in the accuracy of the counting and tallying processes. Most importantly, 95% experienced the elections as having been free and fair.

“We are glad that this survey found that 93% of the voters commended the Commission's efforts to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 at the voting stations. Overall, voters are saying their lived electoral reality is positive and consistent with their expectations of integrity standards in the voting process,” noted Mamabolo.

Adopting digital technology

“This election was much about participation as it was about the introduction of digital solutions in the electoral process,” observed Mamabolo.

“The use of the voter management devices, or VMDs, catapulted electoral management in our country to new heights. No doubt, operational challenges were encountered, yet despite that, the 2021 Municipal Elections were the most technologically advanced ever held in the country,” he added.

On voting days, the Commission deployed 30 387 VMDs which were centrally connected through an access point network. This digital connection enabled the strengthening of controls in the voting process. Once ballots were issued to the voter, they could not present themselves at another voting station without detection. In use at the voting, stations were live, centrally connected voters' roll. This capability will decisively lay to rest allegations of double voting.

With the VMD possibilities abound: the prospect of building additional engines and reports will enable the real-time monitoring of the quantities of ballot papers issued and on hand at each voting station. This will remedy the reports of voting stations running out of ballot papers.

“Therefore, the introduction of the VMD can only serve to fortify controls in the voting process and enhancing capability to manage the voting process efficiently. Any challenges as we experienced them in the 2021 Municipal Elections should not cloud our desire to exploit digital technology to better our electoral engagement. We dare not retard the progress we have made,” said Mamabolo.

Free and fair

In terms of Section 190 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the mandate of the Electoral Commission is to:

- compile and maintain a voters' roll
- manage elections of national, provincial, and municipal legislative bodies
- ensure that those elections are free and fair, and
- declare the results of those elections.

On the evening of 4 November 2021, Chairperson Mashinini announced the results of the 2021 Municipal Elections which are determined in terms of

Section 64 (1) (b) of the Municipal Electoral Act.

The role of the Commission is to satisfy itself that the conditions for free and fair elections were met in all these elections.

Among the factors which the Commission must consider in declaring an election free and fair is first whether the electoral regulations, laws, and agreed processes were followed.

Secondly, where irregularities and breaches did occur, what impact did this have on the outcome of the election.

The Commission was satisfied that, bar a few incidents, for which it apologised, that it had delivered quality elections.

The Commission was happy to report that its unique political party liaison committee system is working.

“It is through this system that we caught an electoral officer who had transgressed our electoral laws by stuffing ballots into a box. It is because of the vigilance of party agents and members of the PLC that the stuffed ballot box, as well as the mishandling of used ballots, were exposed.”

Between 1 and 4 November 2021, the Commission received and cleared 290 objections, after investigations and deliberations.

The Electoral Commission has satisfied itself that the conditions for free and fair elections were met and that the results for 213 councils are declared as final results.

There were 26.1-million voters registered for these elections. Approximately 370 000 were registered in the pre-approved MEC 7 list. A total of 12.3 million South Africans voted in these elections, resulting in a 46% turnout.

In terms of the 213 municipalities contested:

- The African National Congress achieved a majority in 161 municipalities
- The Democratic Alliance achieved a majority in 13 municipalities
- And the Inkatha Freedom Party achieved a majority in 10 municipalities.

In 66 municipalities no party achieved a majority – which is known as hung councils, and in four (4) municipalities there were tied councils, that is two parties won the same number of seats.

For the full set of election results and ensuing seat allocation, please visit the Electoral Commission's website at www.elections.org.za.

Serving South Africa's people

Mamabolo said that the 2021 Municipal Elections saw 95 000 of our fellow compatriots raise their hands

and offer themselves as candidates for the civic duty to serve on municipal councils.

“As with any election, not all contestants emerge victorious. We nonetheless honour all those who made themselves available for election, because, without such participation, our electoral reality is hollow.”

“To the 10 400 elected councillors, we raise our hands to you in a congratulatory wave. The voters have bestowed trust in your ability to service the communities you now represent. You owe them a measure of gratitude. Our proposition is that the best reward you can offer them is selflessness and service-mindedness towards communities you are to represent,” added Mamabolo.

Chairperson Mashinini also congratulated the 10 461 councilors who have won the right to serve our people.

“We urge them to go out and make the lives of our people better. Go out and ensure that our communities develop and live in peace. Go out and, through your honest and ethical work, guarantee the future of our children.”

“Through these elections, we are proud to proclaim to the world that we are still flying high the banner of electoral integrity, excellence, and free and fair elections,” concluded Mashinini. ■

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Chairperson Glen Mashinini at the 2021 Municipal Elections results announcement